

THE
POLITICAL THOUGHT
OF
PAUL CLAUDEL

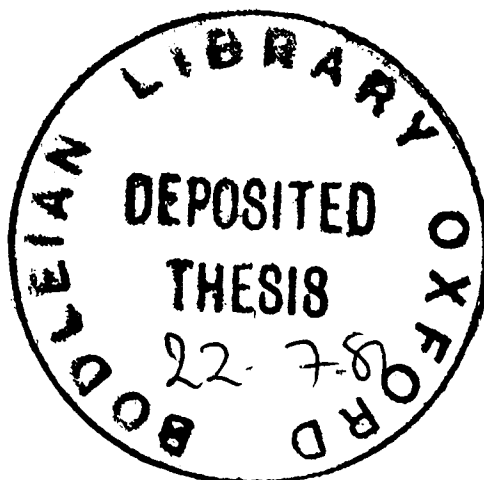
by

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Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Oxford.

Trinity Term, 1980.
[i.e. 1981]

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to express my gratitude to Professor Richard Griffiths, my supervisor, and to Mme. Renée Claudel-Nantet who so generously allowed me to consult unpublished material in the archives of the Société Paul Claudel. I also wish to thank Mr. Peter Allen, the late M. Pierre Claudel, Herr Rainer Dobbelstein, Mlle. Paulette-France Enjalran, Professor Gilbert Gadoffre, Dr. Maria Keipert, Mr. John Lord, M. Jacques Madaule, M. Emmanuel Monick, the abbé François Morlot, M. François Perroux, Professor Jacques Petit, and the many others, especially my wife and my father, who have given advice, support, or indication of source material.

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Linacre College, D. Phil., Trinity Term 1980 [1981]

Claudé's interest in political and social questions was reflected in almost every area of his writings, but it has not hitherto been the subject of a broad survey showing what his ideas were, how far they cohered together, how they evolved in response to changing circumstances, and how they reflected wider currents of opinion in France. This thesis is the first step towards a balanced overview. Since reliable contemporary evidence of his ideas up to approximately 1905 is relatively scarce, the study concentrates primarily on his writings from 1905 to the time of his death in 1955, but takes account of earlier evidence where relevant. Reference is made not only to Claudé's published works but also to a large body of unpublished material, including correspondence with writers such as François Mauriac and Georges Duhamel or with political figures, such as Édouard Herriot and Charles de Gaulle.

The study is structured on the basis of broad chronological divisions. It gives parallel coverage of Claudé's views on French society and on international affairs during each of the major periods under discussion. In both of these areas his thinking is shown to have reflected a wealth of idiosyncratic contradictions. His political views manifested the complexity of a personality which could swing rapidly between savage intransigence and pragmatism, cynicism and near-utopian idealism. The labels often applied to Claudé during his lifetime - reactionary, traditionalist, conservative, authoritarian,

jingoist - were all accurate. But there was also a side of Claudel which could accept the modern world, welcome change, and be concerned by the need to find solutions to the social problems of his day. Equally, his capacity for bellicism and patriotic bombast did not prevent him from developing increasingly fervent sympathy for the cause of European unity, international organisation in general, and a mystical ideal of the unification of mankind.

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INTRODUCTION

Claudé's interest in political questions was reflected in almost every area of his writings, but there has hitherto been no attempt to make a broad study of his ideas. The need for such a study is all the greater because of the complex, unsystematic, often self-contradictory nature of his thinking. As illustrations of the oversimplified judgements so often passed on Claudé by his contemporaries, mention is made of a number of articles in the press at the time of his death in 1955. This thesis is the first step towards establishing a balanced overview. It sheds light on the cross-fertilisation between his many diverse interests as religious thinker, diplomat and artist. It also brings forward new evidence in the form of a large body of unpublished material.

The subject is limited in three ways: (a) Claudé's consular and diplomatic activities are used as background, where relevant, but are not discussed in their own right; (b) his plays are used only as supporting evidence since they are not necessarily reliable statements of their author's opinions; (c) the thesis - which is structured on the basis of broad chronological divisions - focuses primarily on his writings from 1905 to 1955, since the earlier part of his life furnishes little solid evidence. Two sets of examples - the first, relating to his outlook on French society around 1890 and the second, concerning his reaction to Chinese society during the late 1890s - serve as a prologue and as an illustration of the problem of establishing his early development.

CHAPTER I. The Reactionary

After opening with brief background remarks on Claudel's consular career and other aspects of his life during the decade before 1914, the discussion turns initially on his reaction to various forms of attack on the Church, which strongly coloured his whole approach to questions of French government and society throughout the pre-war period. His denunciations of the nineteenth-century worship of science, his views on the Dreyfus Affair, the Church-State separation, the education question, and other related issues reflect the polarised political climate of the time. Against this backcloth consideration is given to Claudel's hostility towards the Revolution and its contemporary heritage, both in terms of moral values and political organisation.

As against the moral and spiritual ills which he attributed to French society - materialism, individualism, egalitarianism and others - Claudel formulated an ideal of unity and practical charity based on traditional Catholic principles. Like many Catholic traditionalists of the time he defended the Church, the family and a paternalistic conception of the workingmen's association as moral bastions against the encroaching, impersonal power of the centralised State. He was also attracted to the principle of monarchical government. However, his attitude towards the Action Française group showed that: (a) he did not seriously believe a restoration of the monarchy was likely in the foreseeable future; (b) despite his own tendency to violent reaction he was wary of Maurras's violent attacks on the Republic.

CHAPTER II. The Enlightened Imperialist

The chapter is entirely devoted to discussion of Claudel's views on imperialism in China during the pre-1914 period. It is based largely on the various drafts of Sous le signe du dragon (1905-1911) and starts out from observations on unanswered questions surrounding the evolution of the book and the circumstances under which it was written. The second section of the chapter gives an outline of Claudel's positivistic analysis of Chinese social structures and the characteristics of the Chinese people. Although his manner was for the most part detached, his arguments suggest sympathy (echoing his earlier writings and anticipating his later nostalgic reminiscences) for this closed, traditional, organic society. How then did Claudel reconcile this sympathy with his awareness that the presence of the imperialist Powers (of which he himself was a representative) was destroying the social balance which had previously existed? In his Claudel et l'univers chinois Gilbert Gadoffre has given an excessively negative impression of Claudel's attitude towards imperialist activity there. A re-examination of the evidence shows the extreme complexity of Claudel's position. He was prepared to justify the opening-up of China (to European trade, to European civilisation and to Catholicism) despite its disruptive effects on Chinese society. But his awareness of these effects also reinforced his belief that the anarchical rivalry between the imperialist Powers themselves was costing them much of the commercial profit which could be gained by a more rational, concerted approach to developing China. He was therefore led to argue the need for the Powers to collaborate in imposing a coherent administration of the country on modern European lines and a massive programme of public works.

CHAPTER III. The Patriot

Claudé had returned to Europe from the Far East in 1909 and, after a two-year posting to Prague, was to be serving in Germany during the last three years before the outbreak of war while heated debate raged in France on the question of extending the period of compulsory military service to counter the military threat from Germany. Although Claudé's contact with the German people had given him a certain sympathy towards them, he was acutely sensitive of the question of French security. He wrote a number of articles in support of the Three Year Law. They show the contrast between Claudé's rational and fanatical sides - rational assessment of Germany's position, uncontrolled polemic against antimilitarists in France.

With the coming of war, Claudé's hatred was turned against the invaders, whose actions he interpreted as an attack by Satanic forces of Protestantism and a manifestation of Germany's destiny to fulfil an eternally disruptive role in Europe throughout history. Conversely, at the outset, he believed that France was being purged of her past crimes in preparation for return to her Providential role as defender of the Catholic faith, though this conviction appears to have faded as the war continued. His mystical speculations on the meaning of the war were ultimately inconclusive, but, on another level of his thought, there was a growing belief that the conflict was preparing the way for new, more rational forms of organisation within and between nations.

CHAPTER IV. Progress and Tradition

During the inter-war years Claudel's interest in the idea of movement towards a more united, better organised society showed itself in different forms according to changing circumstances. In the years of relative stability before the crises of the 1930s he was not preoccupied with the need for political changes, though he remained critical of the existing system. At this time his attention was turned to more general reflections of contemporary social development. The Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher (1925-1928) showed Claudel airing many of his old grievances against the values of the modern world, but also illustrating, by means of examples drawn from particular areas of social life (notably urbanisation, agricultural and industrial organisation), how a new spirit of community and co-operation might emerge in the future. The book also suggests Claudel's continued attachment to the idea of authoritarian government, but it now anticipated the somewhat technocratic colouring which this notion was to gather in his writings of the 1930s.

When the crises of the 1930s seemed to threaten the whole established order in France, Claudel turned more closely to specifically political issues. His writings contained an eclectic mixture of ideas but were broadly in line with the positions of the neo-traditionalist ligues and various other groups of the new Right. Extending certain themes which had appeared in the Conversations, he took up the call for class fusion, rationalisation of the economy on the lines, for instance, of the New Deal, managerial reforms in industry, co-operative experiments in agriculture, and, inevitably, strong leadership.

CHAPTER V. The Idiosyncratic Internationalist

Discussion of certain aspects of Claudel's diplomatic activity from 1919 to 1935 serves as background to the analysis of his views on international relations during the inter-war period. Particular emphasis is placed on his association with Briandist policies towards Germany and the USA. A set of general articles written early in 1936 is taken as a vantage-point for looking back over a mass of disparate evidence dating from earlier years, to show the component elements of the curious internationalism which had been developing in his thought. His ideas showed a wealth of inconsistencies - elements of pacifism alongside elements of bellicism; elements of Catholic universalism alongside echoes of the nineteenth-century historicist myth of progress; elements of imperialism alongside elements of federalism; and a willingness to see all paths as leading towards the unification of mankind.

The contradictions within Claudel's thinking were to manifest themselves in his reactions to the crises punctuating the last years before the Second World War. To some extent his inconsistencies were the reflection of wider confusions in French public opinion, but they also owed much to the idiosyncratic nature of his internationalism. Tracing his reactions to the war in Ethiopia, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, the Spanish Civil War, the Anschluss, Munich, the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the approach of war explains how, on the very eve of the German invasion of France, Claudel could be found arguing that the unification of Europe could follow the conclusion of the forthcoming war.

CHAPTER VI. Hopes and Humiliations

The German invasion nullified Claudel's hopes of a short, victorious war, but he remained pro-British and anti-defeatist throughout the conflict. He was also able to offer himself consolations in the form of a mystical interpretation of the war as a further paradoxical step towards the unification of mankind, and, on a more concrete level, he continued to reflect on the future organisation of Europe.

In the early months of the Occupation Claudel's attitude towards the Vichy régime appeared ambivalent, rather than enthusiastic, despite the fact that he welcomed the ending of parliamentary government, the restoration of authority, and the introduction of legislation favouring the interests of the Church. However, for a few months (from December 1940 to the early summer of 1941) he held Pétain himself in high esteem. This was followed by rapid disenchantment and outrage at the repressive measures taken against Jews and others at the behest of the Germans.

From the time of Montoire onwards Claudel had condemned the Government's policy of collaboration. Although he does not appear to have made any practical contribution to resistance work, except in the most indirect sense, he saw himself as being among the spiritually unconquered. However, he was later accused of economic collaboration, since he had been a director of a firm which had taken orders for aero-engines from the Germans. Details are given of his explanation of his position and the difficult questions which it raises. At the Liberation Claudel was overjoyed and wrote a fulsome ode to de Gaulle whom he saw as the man destined to give France the leadership she needed in the future.

CHAPTER VII. Short-Lived Dreams

The need for economic reconstruction and political reorganisation after the Liberation stimulated Claudel to a period of enthusiasm for the idea of change. While protesting against left-wing pressure for nationalisations, he himself wrote a long series of articles in 1944 and 1945 advocating widespread application of co-operative principles in industry, agriculture, the organisation of services, local government, and other fields. As always, however, there were ambiguities in his thinking, and it is also uncertain whether he fully understood the economic implications of the programme he was suggesting. His enthusiasm for these ideas appears to have faded after 1946.

Claudel's other great hope had been that de Gaulle would hold onto the reigns of power at all costs and prevent any return to the political system which had existed under the Third Republic. At that time, Claudel seems to have been thinking in terms of some form of plebiscitary presidential system. He had written to de Gaulle on the morrow of the Liberation. From that time onwards, personal contacts developed and were maintained after de Gaulle's resignation from power in January 1946. In 1947 Claudel was urging de Gaulle to take control of the country by any means necessary. A year later de Gaulle nominated him to the Conseil National of the RPF. By that time, however, Claudel was beginning to lose faith in the General and the way had already been paved for their subsequent break in 1951.

CHAPTER VIII. Grand Designs

In the immediate aftermath of the war Claudel had hopes that he would see temporal manifestations of his earlier prophecy that the conflict had marked a step in the Providential movement of mankind towards unity. Certain events confirmed his belief that humanity was, indeed, destined to move in this direction, but, in the immediate, the concrete temporal possibilities were more limited. With the coming of the Cold War his position was firmly atlanticist and ferociously anti-Soviet. He shed no tears for the progressive abandonment of France's between-East-and-West-policy. He served for some years as president of the Société France-USA, a government-sponsored friendship organisation. His faith in the American link was dented, however, by what he saw as a culpable series of retreats in South-East Asia, culminating in Eisenhower's refusal to intervene militarily on France's behalf at the time of Dien Bien Phu. This led Claudel to a reassessment of his previous bellicist position.

On the question of Franco-German relations and European organisation, the need to find a durable solution to the former, in order to initiate the latter, was an idea which recurred constantly in his writings, though his thinking was by no means devoid of ambiguities. It was on this question that his views came to diverge particularly from de Gaulle's and this was ultimately a decisive factor in his resignation from the RPF in 1951, when the latter aligned itself against the plan for the European Coal and Steel Community. Claudel himself achieved a near-apotheosis in 1953 when he addressed an audience in Hamburg on the theme of Franco-German reconciliation.

CONCLUSIONS

The thesis does not claim to be definitive, but to have produced a sufficient body of evidence to give an accurate picture of Claudel's central preoccupations and of the essential characteristics of his approach to political questions. While recognising the danger of exaggeration, the most striking feature of his thinking was his capacity to swing rapidly between mutually contradictory, or at least inconsistent attitudes. The conclusions centre on the charges levelled at Claudel by his political detractors at the time of his death. As they claimed, there was a reactionary in him who could pronounce sweeping condemnations of the modern world; a traditionalist who clung to the values of the past; a conservative who feared change; and an authoritarian. But there was also the side of him which could accept the modern world, welcome change and be concerned to find solutions to the social problems of his day. As his critics also claimed, Claudel could be a jingoist. But that had not prevented him from increasingly fervent sympathy for the cause of European unity and the notion of coherent international organisation in the world as a whole. As his critics claimed, there may well have been an element of opportunism in Claudel's ability to come to terms profitably with successive régimes. But this ability was also the product of a mind which consciously rejected dogmatic attachment to any political system, group or theory. Claudel was an extraordinary man. Taken individually, his ideas were not necessarily original or especially profound. Taken as a whole, they have a certain sprawling grandeur and are sufficiently idiosyncratic to defy conventional political classifications.

ABBREVIATIONS

<u>AA</u>	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amt
<u>ASPC</u>	Archives of the Société Paul Claudel
<u>BSPC</u>	<u>Bulletin de la Société Paul Claudel</u>
<u>CCC</u>	<u>Cahiers canadiens Claudel</u>
<u>Chroniques</u>	<u>Chroniques du Journal de Clichy</u>
<u>Corres.PC-AG</u>	<u>Correspondance Paul Claudel-André Gide</u>
<u>Corres.PC-AS</u>	<u>Correspondance Paul Claudel-André Suarès</u>
<u>Corres.PC-LM</u>	<u>Correspondance Paul Claudel-Louis Massignon</u>
<u>Corres.PC-FJ/GF</u>	<u>Correspondance Paul Claudel-Francis Jammes- Gabriel Frizeau</u>
<u>Corres.PC-JR</u>	<u>Correspondance Paul Claudel-Jacques Rivière</u>
<u>CPC</u>	<u>Cahiers Paul Claudel</u>
<u>Jo.</u>	<u>Journal (Pléiade)</u>
<u>MI</u>	<u>Mémoires improvisés</u>
<u>OC</u>	<u>Oeuvres complètes</u>
<u>Po.</u>	<u>Oeuvre poétique (Pléiade, 1967 edition)</u>
<u>Pr.</u>	<u>Oeuvres en prose (Pléiade)</u>
<u>QNSP</u>	<u>Qui ne souffre pas ?</u>
<u>Th.</u>	<u>Théâtre (Pléiade, 1967 edition of Vol.I, 1965 edition of Vol.II)</u>

Full publication details of the sources mentioned above are to be found in the bibliography appended to this thesis. Where individual works by Claudel have been reprinted in both the Oeuvres complètes and the Pléiade editions, I have made reference to the latter since these include useful footnotes and indexes which are not to be found in the Oeuvres complètes.

INTRODUCTION

Born two years before the fall of the Second Empire, Claudel lived to see the entire course of the Third Republic, the short but profound upheaval of the Vichy period, and almost the whole span of the Fourth Republic. Throughout most of his life he was close to the political world. After leaving school in 1885 he took Politics and Law at university while he was preparing himself for a career in the civil service. Later, his professional activities as a consul and diplomat not only made him an agent of French foreign policies, but also brought him into contact with political circles in other countries, and allowed him to observe societies with very different traditions from those of France. After his retirement in 1935, he continued to maintain wide contacts among leading politicians, publicists and diplomats. It is not surprising, therefore, that his interest in political and social questions should have been reflected to a greater or lesser degree in almost every area of his writings, from poetry to newspaper articles to commentaries on the Scriptures.

However, while other areas of his thought have been extensively analysed during the twenty-five years since his death, Claudel's political views have hitherto been studied in only the most piecemeal, and often superficial manner. There has been no attempt to make a broad survey of what his ideas were, how far they cohered together, how they evolved in response to changing circumstances, and how they reflected wider currents of opinion in France. The need for such a study is all the more important because Claudel was a particularly complex character, who was not inclined to systematise

his opinions, nor to iron out the contradictions in his thinking: the evidence itself is therefore diffuse, scattered in fragments and frequently ambiguous. Consequently, without an overall frame of reference to distinguish the constants, the changes and the confusions, any comment on his politics runs a serious risk of falsifying or oversimplifying his position.

This was an error which was widely committed by Claudel's contemporaries, who were, in many cases, all too eager to pass facile judgements based on a confused amalgam of impressions gleaned from his plays and other creative writings, a few notorious positions which he had adopted at various times, or his ability to gain official honours and material wealth under successive political régimes. For example, in the Parisian press during the week following his death on 23 February 1955, there was no shortage of such comments from his political detractors, even though they might pay homage to his talent as an artist. Thus, one finds the remarks of André Fontaine in Le Monde:

Catholique affiché, partisan en politique d'une assez fumeuse théocratie, il servit sans embarras, fidèlement, appuyé par Philippe Berthelot, la République très laïque. Son œuvre conserve des traces, parfois superflues, de son dévouement aux autorités. Le 'Tant que vous voudrez mon général' des Poèmes de guerre constitue un lyrique pendant aux exhortations du général Cherfils et l'on s'en voudrait d'insister sur l'étonnante ressemblance à trois ans d'intervalle de 'l'Ode au maréchal' et 'l'Ode au général'. Pour qu'il se risquât à critiquer l'État il fallut les nationalisations; elles inspirèrent à l'administrateur de Gnome et Rhône une bien curieuse page, farcie de citations de la Bible qui eussent pu trouver un meilleur

emploi. Mais pourquoi le talent serait-il l'apanage des héros et des saints?¹

Others on the moderate and extreme Left might not label Claudel a theocrat, but he could be variously portrayed as a traditionalist,² an authoritarian,³ a conservative,⁴ or as a reactionary, clinging to nostalgia for a bygone civilisation to the exclusion of any concern for the aspirations of modern society.⁵ Nor was Fontaine alone in drawing attention to Claudel's jingoistic war poems, his capitalistic business connections, or the striking similarity between his ode to Pétain in 1940 and his ode to de Gaulle in 1944.⁶

A faint echo of these criticisms could even be heard in La Croix, where Lucien Guissard felt obliged to note that Claudel had often shown himself forgetful of 'les misères sociales',

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1. André Fontaine, "Une œuvre à l'échelle de la création", Le Monde, 24 Feb. 1955. Like the authors of other articles quoted in this preface, Fontaine nevertheless acknowledged Claudel's great abilities as an artist.
 2. Pierre de Boisdeffre, "Paul Claudel reste vivant", Combat, 24 Feb. 1955.
 3. Henri Jeanson, "L'Opération Claudel", Le Canard enchaîné, 2 March 1955. This article contains a long and particularly venomous diatribe, written in the days immediately following the grandiose funeral (financed by the State) at Notre-Dame.
 4. Georges Altman, "Ce qu'on aime dans l'irritant génie de Paul Claudel", Franc-Tireur, 24 Feb. 1955.
 5. Paul Morelle, "Paul Claudel, un grand poète étranger à son temps", Libération, 24 Feb. 1955.
 6. See, for example, Henri Jeanson, art. cit; Paul Morelle, art. cit; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Claudel était-il un génie?", L'Express, 5 March 1955.

though this oversight was disarmingly attributed to Claudel's overwhelming preoccupation with the spiritual, rather than the temporal salvation of the world.¹ As for Jules Romains in L'Aurore, his judgement was that "Claudel chérissait l'ordre dans son antique établissement; et à défaut d'antiquité, le fait d'être établi constituait à ses yeux un titre, lui insufflait un bon commencement d'enthousiasme".² Meanwhile, on the extreme Right, in Aspects de la France and Rivarol, although he was naturally exempt from being attacked as a reactionary, Claudel was denounced as an opportunist who had been, as one columnist put it, "fervent de la troisième République tant qu'elle existe, puis la traitant d'affreuse baraque après sa chute", then hailing Pétain, and later de Gaulle, "qui a relevé la baraque".³

Most of these summary judgements contained some element of truth, but they nevertheless conveyed an entirely false impression. There was, indeed, a reactionary in Claudel who could pronounce sweeping condemnations of the modern world; a traditionalist who clung to the values of the past; an authoritarian, and a conservative who feared social change. But there was also a side of Claudel which could accept the modern world, welcome change and be concerned by the need to find viable solutions to the social problems of his day. So too, he was capable of the most bombastic jingoism, but

1. Lucien Guissard, "Paul Claudel", La Croix, 27 Feb. 1955.

2. Jules Romains, "Paul Claudel succombe", L'Aurore, 24 Feb. 1955.

3. Jacques Villedieu, "Revue de la presse", Aspects de la France, 4 March 1955. See also, André Thérive, "Souvenirs sur Paul Claudel", and Robert Poulet, "Paul Claudel et son œuvre", both in Rivarol, 3 March 1955.

that did not prevent him from developing increasingly fervent sympathy for the cause of European unity, and an attachment to the ideal of coherent international organisation in the world as a whole. Equally, while the charge of self-serving opportunism cannot be entirely dismissed, his ability to come to terms profitably with successive régimes was also the product of a mind which consciously rejected dogmatic adhesion to any political system, group, or ideology.

The purpose of this thesis, then, is to explore the central preoccupations and paradoxes in Claudel's political outlook as a first step towards establishing a balanced overview. Because it draws on material scattered through so many areas of Claudel's published writings, it will, in turn, throw a clearer light on the cross-fertilisation between his remarkably diverse interests as an artist, religious thinker, diplomat, and hard-headed man of the world. At the same time, it will also add to existing knowledge by bringing forward a considerable body of new evidence in the form of unpublished correspondence with Charles de Gaulle, François Mauriac, Wladimir d'Ormesson, Georges Duhamel, and others.

Certain limitations have been placed on the subject as a whole. On the one hand, I have not made a detailed examination of Claudel's consular and diplomatic activities as such. In accomplishing his duties he enjoyed a greater or lesser scope for initiative, for personal judgement, and for making recommendations in his reports, but he was nevertheless an agent, whose field of action was defined by the instructions of his superiors in response

to governmental policies. However, the general nature of his experience, and the crucial influences to which it exposed him are naturally taken into account.

On the other hand, I have not sought to offer a reinterpretation of any of Claudel's dramatic works, nor to use them as a foundation on which to establish his ideas. This thesis will provide valuable background material which will help to correct many of the misunderstandings and oversimplified judgements which have been made on the basis of his plays, but the dramas themselves are, at best, unreliable sources for my own purpose, and, at worst, could be positively misleading. The complexity of his dramatic technique, the interweaving of themes, the balance of contradictions, the use of polysemic symbolism, and a variety of other factors - including the vague, changeable, sometimes mutually conflicting, retrospective accounts given by Claudel himself - leave these works of creative fiction open to a wide variety of interpretations and make it extremely dangerous to read them as if they were exact statements of their author's opinions in the real world. The diversity of political meanings which have been attributed to L'Otage, for instance, is an ample illustration of this problem. The precise extent to which the words or actions of Claudel's characters do, in fact, correspond to his views, can only be judged when these views are already established on the basis of other less equivocal evidence. For this reason my own references to the dramatic works will be restricted, for the most part, to brief, parenthetical comments in the cases where themes in the plays can be usefully noted to corroborate non-fictional sources.

Given the unsuitability of the plays as reliable evidence, I have placed a partial limitation on the chronological focus of the thesis. Because much of the published and unpublished material on which I have drawn records, or is strongly coloured by Claudel's reactions to immediate issues arising in France or on the international stage, the study as a whole is structured on the basis of broad chronological divisions, within which the analysis is ordered in various ways, depending on the nature of the evidence available for the particular periods under consideration. In the best of all possible worlds I would, therefore, have set out to trace his development from the time of his youth in response to formative influences, such as the views of his family, friends and teachers, his studies and his private reading. However, this is impracticable. For the earlier part of Claudel's life, up to the time when he was in his mid-thirties, there is little contemporary evidence apart from his plays themselves. Moreover, his later reminiscences of that period were extremely imprecise and may well have been distorted.¹ Consequently, my detailed analysis will take as its starting point the ten years before the outbreak of the First World War.

1. See Henri Guillemin, Le "Converti", Paul Claudel, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, p.17, where Guillemin quotes from an interview given to him by Claudel on 3 - 4 Sept. 1942: "J'ai une excellente mémoire, mais déformante". Guillemin's own attempt to unravel the truth behind the legends of Claudel's early life was, of course, hampered by the lack of contemporary evidence. However, his book amply illustrates the veracity of Claudel's words to him in 1942, and emphasises the danger of identifying Claudel too closely with his fictional characters.

As to the earlier period, I shall, of course, have reason to refer back to it on occasion in the light of his positions during the pre-war years. In the meantime, by way of a prologue, and as an illustration of the problem of establishing his early development, two brief sets of examples may be mentioned here; the first, relating to his outlook while he was still living in Paris in the late 1880s and early 1890s; the second, concerning his reactions to Chinese society during his first posting to the East between 1895 and 1899.

Claud l's later reminiscences - expressed, for the most part, in explanation of his frame of mind at the time when he wrote T te d'Or (1889) and La Ville (1890-1891) - laid considerable emphasis on his mood of revolt during this period. He had felt a violent desire for freedom, which had been stimulated by his need to escape from the conflicts within his family, his continued inability to adapt to life in Paris after a childhood spent in small provincial towns, and, above all, by the massive spiritual conflict arising from his conversion.¹

In this mood of tension and revolt, did Claud l, like many of his young contemporaries, see himself as an opponent of the established political and social order? Henri Guillemin reports that in a letter written to him by Claud l on 22 May 1952, Claud l described himself and his father as having been passionate admirers of General Boulanger during the political crisis of the late 1880s.²

1. See MI, pp. 24-25, 28-29, 50-51, 56-57, 60.

2. *op. cit.*, p.96.

Indeed, Professor Guillemin suggests that alongside the Shakespearian, Rimbaldian and other literary influences, this admiration was surely "une source complémentaire" of Tête d'Or, and that the charismatic warrior-hero of the play was Boulanger "dans une transfiguration sublime".¹ If that was the case, and if we disregard the ambiguities of the play itself, as well as the other, deeper levels of symbolism, we might be tempted to assume that Claudel felt an early attraction to Caesarism and aggressive nationalism.

Claudel also recalled on more than one occasion that he had felt a considerable sympathy for anarchism during the 1890s, a feeling which he had shared with many of his friends.² In his Mémoires improvisés, he claimed that, hating Paris, he had also been appalled by the selfish, divided society which he saw around him, and had thus seen anarchist terrorism as, in a sense, a justified gesture against this claustrophobic, hideous world.³ Certainly, his play, La Ville, captures the atmosphere of social conflict which underlay the bright veneer of the dawning belle époque. It evokes the contrast between the private gardens of the rich and the working-class slums, the confrontation between representatives of liberal capitalism and those calling for a new socialist order. But would Claudel really have wished to see the old society destroyed by revolution as it is in the play? And if this was the case, does the fact that the play ends with

1. id. See also André Alter, Claudel, Paris, Seghers, 1968, pp.46-47, for a similar view (though Alter gives the erroneous impression that Boulangism was an exclusively left-wing phenomenon).
2. See MI, p.73; Conversations dans Le Loir-et-Cher, Pr., p.670; words to Henri Guillemin, quoted by Guillemin in "Claudel et Zola", Les Cahiers naturalistes, XIII, 1959, p.526; and Paul Claudel interroge l'Apocalypse, OC XXV, p.148 for a further melodramatic recollection of his hatred of Paris.
3. MI, p.73.

the installation of a Catholic king mean that Claudel's long-delayed return to religious practice in December 1890 had transformed his previous taste for Caesarism into some form of revolutionary monarchism?

Speculation on these, and other, similar questions becomes even more hazardous when it is remembered that Claudel's mental energies were by no means exclusively concentrated on developing his creative faculties or on the spiritual upheaval which had followed the moment of revelation at Notre-Dame in 1886. Nor was the entirety of his time spent in the company of his Symbolist and other young avant-garde literary acquaintances who saw themselves as artistically and socially in revolt against the sordid materialism of bourgeois society. The son of a minor civil servant who was prepared to make financial sacrifices to provide a first-class education for his children, Claudel had meanwhile been diligently studying his Law and Political Economy at the Faculté de Droit, where he had graduated in 1888.¹ At the same time, he had been successfully completing courses in a variety of political, administrative and economic subjects at the prestigious École libre des Sciences politiques, one of the educational bastions of the Third Republic, and a major training-ground for aspiring entrants into the more esteemed branches of

1. Claudel's fiche de scolarité is held in the Archives nationales, file Fiches individuelles de scolarité, régime nouveau de 1840 à 1905 (catalogue no. AJ 16 1697). Details of the courses forming the licence (Histoire générale du droit français public et privé; Droit international privé; Économie politique) can be found in Faculté de Droit de Paris: Programme de Cours, Paris, Imprimerie Moquet, 1885-1888.

the civil service.¹

Claud l had at first intended to try for entry into the Conseil d' tat, but later chose to attempt the Grand Concours for entry into the Foreign Ministry.² Although the system of competitive examinations had considerably democratised admission into the more favoured civil service departments, Claud l was undoubtedly aware that it was still advisable for a candidate to have the backing of republican notables as initial proof of general suitability for this type of career. So it was that 1889, the year in which he wrote the violent, Wagnerian saga of T te d'Or, was also the time when he was seeking referees to attest to the respectability of his social and political credentials for being permitted to sit the Grand Concours. With this aim in mind, he wrote to his cousin, Louis, who was evidently on cordial terms with the veteran ex-minister, Jules Ferry:

1. Claud l's dossier at the  cole libre, shown to me by courtesy of the Director of the Institut des Sciences politiques, records that he was registered there for the academic years 1885-1886, 1887-1888. During those two years he took, and passed the following courses: Droit constitutionnel; Histoire parlementaire; Organisation administrative compar e; Mati res administratives;  conomie politique (M. Dunoyer's course on history of social and economic theory);  conomie politique (M. Cheysson's course dealing with basic concepts - production, distribution, circulation, etc.); Commerce ext rieur; Statistique; Langue  trang re (English, no doubt). In all of the above, except the language paper, he achieved marks of 4/6 ('assez bien') or higher, except in the language paper (2½/6 'mauvais'). Two short essays, as well as lists of some of the questions he answered in examinations are also included in the dossier. A long essay, "L'Imp t sur le th  en Angleterre" was published in the Annales des Sciences politiques, IV, 15 Oct. 1889, pp.640-653 (reprinted in CPC IV, pp.81-98). Summaries of the courses are to be found in  cole libre des Sciences politiques: Organisation et programme des cours. Renseignements sur les carri res auxquelles l' cole pr pare, Paris, Librairie Vuibert, 1886-1888.

2. See MI, p.71.

Tu sais que je me présente le 15 janvier 1890 au Concours ouvert pour l'admission dans les Carrières diplomatique et consulaire. Or, cette carrière peut se comparer à une personne qui ne nous connaît pas, et à qui nous avons besoin d'être présentés par d'autres personnes qu'elle connaît. Ce n'est donc pas tant une recommandation que j'aurais voulu demander de (sic) M. Jules Ferry, qu'une simple attestation de l'honorabilité de ma famille et de la fermeté de ses opinions républicaines qui me rendent digne d'être placé sur la liste d'admissibilité préliminaire à ce concours. C'est là un service que la vérité d'abord et puis la gratitude personnelle qu'il doit avoir envers toi lui rendent facile d'accorder il me semble.¹

Ferry complied with the request, and the Quai d'Orsay was to receive two other similar references on Claudel's behalf.² After taking the Concours and being listed first among the successful candidates, Claudel started his training in the commercial section at the Quai d'Orsay, and it was during the earlier part of this period that he wrote La Ville. On the one hand, then, his working days were spent in learning the intricacies of protocol, the drafting of dispatches and economic reports, or details of monetary, commercial and industrial agreements.³ On the other hand, in his moments of

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1. Letter to Louis (Claudel?), "Jeudi" (1889), ASPC. Since this letter has only recently come to light, I have not yet had the opportunity to investigate the connection between Claudel's cousin and Jules Ferry.
 2. The note from Ferry reads simply: "M. Jules Ferry se porte garant de l'honorabilité et des idées républicaines de M. Claudel". The other notes to the same effect were from Rodin, the sculptor, and Auguste Burdeau, a leading republican politician who had formerly been Claudel's philosophy master at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand. All of these are reproduced in a study of Claudel's personal file at the Quai d'Orsay, by Guy Thuillier, "Un jeune diplomate, Paul Claudel", La Revue administrative, 184, July - Aug. 1978, p.374.
 3. See Jean Claude Berton, "Premier séjour de Claudel aux États-Unis," in CPC IV, Claudel diplomate, Paris, Gallimard, 1962, pp.99-101.

leisure, he was writing the play in which Paris and its discordant society were consigned to violent destruction before the birth of a new Christian world. It is small wonder that Claudel's friend, Jules Renard, should pose the question in March 1893: "Mais pourquoi Claudel écrit-il d'une façon Tête d'Or, La Ville et d'une autre ses compositions pour obtenir le poste de vice-consul à New York?".¹

In short, there appears to have been a marked dichotomy in Claudel's thinking at that time, but in the absence of reliable contemporary evidence it is impossible to judge how far this really was the case, or whether it was more the product of Claudel's retrospective desire to build his own legend around his dramatic fiction. My second example, relating to his early experience in China, again seems to point to Claudel's ability to compartmentalise his mind, and in this instance there is a certain amount of contemporary evidence outside his plays. Yet, it is still insufficient to allow a confident assessment of where the balance lay between his contradictions.

By conventional European standards - and in marked contrast to those of the United States, where Claudel had served his initial overseas posting - the Eastern civilisation which he had first encountered in 1895 was stagnant, archaic, pre-industrial, ill-governed, and endowed with a culture turned entirely towards the past. However, as Gilbert Gadoffre has observed, the legend of the artist seeking a new life in more innocent climes far from the ugly

1. Jules Renard, Journal 1887-1910, Paris, Gallimard, (Pléiade), 1960, p.154 (16 March 1893).

soullessness of bourgeois industrial society was by then well established among the French literary avant-garde, and Claudel appears to have cast himself, to some extent, in this role.¹ Within a short time of his arrival he had certainly shown immense enthusiasm for his new surroundings and a corresponding hostility to the world he had left behind. Thus, he wrote to Mallarmé in December 1895:

La Chine est un pays ancien, vertigineux, inextricable. La vie n'y a pas été atteinte par le mal moderne de l'esprit qui se considère lui-même, cherche le mieux et s'enseigne ses propres rêveries. Elle pullule, touffue, naïve, désordonnée des profondes ressources de l'instinct et de la tradition; J'ai la civilisation moderne en horreur et je m'y suis toujours senti étranger. Ici, au contraire, tout paraît naturel et normal; (....).²

A year later, in another letter to Mallarmé, the same idea was still at the forefront of his mind when he remarked: "J'ai trouvé dans le peuple chinois avec sa salubre horreur de tout changement, un peuple selon mon coeur".³ And he had added: "La Chine devient le seul pays où un individu décent peut vivre en paix".⁴ His fascination with this timeless, innocent world was also mirrored in the prose-poems of Connaissance de l'Est, whether he was evoking the total absence of mechanisation and the teeming animal vitality of the native Chinese quarters of Shanghai,

1. Gilbert Gadoffre, Claudel et l'univers Chinois, CPC VIII, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, pp.51-53.

2. Dated 24 Dec. 1895, in CPC I, Tête d'Or et les débuts littéraires, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p.46.

3. Dated 23 Nov. 1896, in *ibid.*, p.50.

4. *id.*

"maison unique d'une famille multipliée" which seemed to capture the very essence of man's past;¹ or whether he was contemplating landscapes, the rhythm of the seasons, figures silhouetted against the sky;² or the architecture which the Chinese were able to harmonise with nature;³ or even when, despite his condemnation of the "fraude diabolique" of Bhuddism, he was exploring the temples of Chinese religion.⁴

These lyrical or meditative reflections contrast with his comment, in a letter to Maurice Pottecher on 20 February 1896, observing that he occasionally read the French press to remind himself of "cette impression de détresse, de misère et de bas vice qui émane à trois heures de l'après-midi de la devanture des cafés-concerts des quartiers excentriques".⁵ Or again, in 1899 he wrote to Pottecher expressing his scorn for the latter's "idées de progrès auquel nous devons tous travailler, de démocratie éclairée, etc.".⁶ This led him to point out that the whole idea

1. "Ville la Nuit", Po., p.33.

2. See, for example, "Le Temple de la conscience", ibid., pp. 51-52, "Novembre", ibid., pp. 53-55, "La Source", ibid., pp.96-97.

3. See "Ça et là", ibid., pp.87-88.

4. "Ça et là", ibid., p.90 for remarks on the satanic nature of Bhuddism, but for fascination with the temples and their symbols see, for example, "Pagode", ibid., pp.26-30, "Religion du signe", pp.47-48.

5. In CPC I, p.99.

6. Undated (1899), in ibid., p.107.

of progress was meaningless to him: he did not believe that mankind progressed, "mais qu'elle développe sur le plan de l'éternité comme un tableau et comme une harmonie".¹

Yet Claudel had not come to China as a bohemian exile, but as a professional agent of French imperialist interests, at a time when the Great Powers were intent on extracting maximum advantage from the disintegration of the Manchu Empire in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War. It was the period of concession-grabbing and the carving out of spheres of interest. Moreover, while considerations of strategy, prestige and cultural expansion played their part, commerce was a major impetus to Western penetration of China, which meant that the consular services had a particularly important role to play. In his study of Claudel's life and work in China, Gilbert Gadoffre has shown that Claudel was a conscientious and enterprising agent during his first period of duty there. He might profess little love for the hectic social life of the European concessions, but in all other respects he was very much a part of the imperialists' world. He was a party to hard-headed politico-commercial negotiations with businessmen and officials to obtain mining or industrial rights or the extension of transportation facilities. He was the author of detailed reports analysing aspects of commercial development in China, and, in a number of cases, putting forward recommendations for means of deepening French penetration of the market. Administration of the French municipalities,

1. id.

the deployment of native labour, the quest for trading opportunities - all of these activities formed part and parcel of Claudel's working life as a representative of the very forces of progress which were most alien to the traditional patterns of Chinese civilisation.¹

What are we to make of this curious ability to condemn modern society and admire the picturesque archaism of China, while acting on behalf of France in the execution of policies which, in conjunction with those of other imperialist Powers, could not but affect the balance of the society that he admired? The contradiction is interesting in so far as it anticipates paradoxes which we shall encounter later. However, given the paucity of reliable evidence, it would be dangerous to read too much into it at this stage. We do not know, for instance, whether his admiration for this changeless society extended at that time to its governmental system, its administration and its economic organisation. Nor do we have any information on his attitude towards the effects which imperialist activity was having in China, or for that matter, towards the question of imperialist expansion in general. Equally, his few scathing remarks on the subject of French society give little more than a general impression of emotional distaste and offer no hint of what his political preferences were, or whether they had changed since the time of his youth. We might, of course, speculate further on

1. For details of the above, both historical background and Claudel's activities, see Gadoffre, *op. cit.*, pp.59-107: also, Thuillier, *art. cit.*, pp.378-385, which includes some further details, such as favourable reports on Claudel's abilities; his efforts to obtain promotion; his participation in the defence of the French concession at Shanghai against Chinese rioters in 1898.

these questions in the light of his revision of La Ville during those years.¹ However, rather than attempt to build further on shifting sands, it will be more fruitful to turn now to Claudel's writings of the pre-war decade.

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1. For an attempt to deduce Claudel's political ideas from this play (viewed as the crystallisation of tendencies which had merely been latent at the time when he wrote La Ville I), see Jacques Petit's introduction to his critical edition of La Ville, Paris, Mercure de France, 1967, especially pp.66-70, 82-90, arguing that Claudel chooses theocracy as the solution to conflicts in his thinking.

CHAPTER I. The Reactionary

A. Prefatory Remarks

In many ways the years between 1905 and 1914 were to mark a period of increasing stability and considerable fulfilment in Claudel's life, despite the fact that they did not pass without crises. On the one hand, they saw him make substantial advances in his consular career. During the 1890s his progress had been perfectly satisfactory, if not as rapid as he would have wished, and he had reached the rank of consul titulaire in 1898.¹ But during the latter half of the second posting which he served in China from 1901 to 1904, his position had been threatened by scandal arising from his liaison with the wife of a businessman and from his activity on behalf of her husband's firm. Catastrophe was averted, however, by the departure of his mistress and by the intervention of Philippe Berthelot, his friend and future protector at the Quai d'Orsay.² After his return to France on leave in 1905, he was promoted to the rank of consul de première classe and was made a chevalier of the Légion d'honneur (an honour for which he had applied some four years earlier).³ A further

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1. See Thuillier, "Un jeune diplomate ...", pp.378-380, for discussion of Claudel's and Claudel's father's efforts in 1897 and early 1898 to obtain his promotion. Claudel's father enlisted the aid of two politicians, Henry Boucher and Charles Krantz, and of Francis de Pressensé, editor of Le Temps, on his son's behalf.
 2. See Gadoffre, Claudé et l'univers chinois, pp.109-121, for discussion of the antecedents of the scandal, investigation of Claudel by the Ministry, Berthelot's intervention, and the ending of the affair.
 3. See Thuillier, art. cit., p.382, for details of Claudel's initial application on 28 Sept.1901, listing his consular achievements and projects.

period in China from 1906 to the summer of 1909 - most of it spent as overseer of the important French concession at Tientsin - involved him in more administrative work than he would have wished, and its closing months were overshadowed by another scandal, when he was accused of "menées cléricales" and the denunciations were taken up in France by Berteaux, vice-president of the Chamber of Deputies. Nevertheless, he was saved by a further intervention by Berthelot, as well as by his own ability to refute the charges.¹ He took up a posting to Prague in 1909 and while there he was confirmed in the rank of consul général. Subsequently, from the autumn of 1911 to the summer of 1914, he moved on to new posts in Frankfurt and Hamburg successively.

1905 had also marked a spiritual and emotional crossroads for Claudel. The ending of his relationship with a married woman was traumatic indeed, but it did allow him to make his peace with the Church. In the early spring of that year he became an oblate of the Benedictine Order, which he had come near to joining as a monk in 1900.² By the closing months of 1905 he felt that he was beginning to recover,

1. See Gadoffre, op. cit., pp.135-142 for an account of accusations brought against Claudel by a former employee of the mairie at Tientsin, and of the subsequent development of the matter. In the wake of the crisis Berthelot (at that time sous-directeur d'Asie at the Quai d'Orsay) wrote to Claudel reassuring him that his future had by no means been jeopardised and that he still had "une brillante carrière à parcourir", (letter dated 5 May 1909, ASPC, Dossier Philippe Berthelot, quoted at length in Gadoffre, op. cit., pp.141-142) .

2. Claudel was received as an oblate on 18 April 1905: see Dom Roger-Marie Debard, "Paul Claudel oblat de Ligugé", Lettre de Ligugé, 51, reproduced in extenso in Jo.I, pp.1040-1041. For an attempt to define the major reasons for Claudel's failure to commit himself to entering the Order as a novice in 1900, see Guillemin, Le "Converti" Paul Claudel, pp.170-192.

and that God had saved him, though at the price of excruciating torment.¹ Moreover, in December the process of putting his spiritual house in order was accompanied by the quest for moral stability through his engagement to the young daughter of a patriarchal Catholic family.² He was married early in 1906 and by 1914 was the proud father of four children.

He undoubtedly had his share of problems during the years after 1905, but in so far as it is realistic to generalise about a man as volatile as Claudel, it would appear that he was reasonably contented with his lot, though on more than one occasion his letters to friends contained a note of self-reproach because he felt he was leading an excessively comfortable, worldly existence which did not entirely accord with the spiritual heroism and self-sacrifice which he saw as an essential part of Catholicism.³ He was also less isolated than he had been in his earlier years. Besides the non-Catholic friends, such as Gide and Suarès, whom he was attempting to convert, he had a small circle of Catholic correspondents and was to

1. See the series of letters to Gabriel Frizeau and to Francis Jammes, 6 Sept.- 19 Oct. 1905, Corres. PC-FJ/GF, pp.57-65.
2. For details of Reine Sainte-Marie-Perrin and her family, see Louis Chaigne, Vie de Paul Claudel, Tours, Mame, 1961, p.92. For the idea of his forthcoming marriage as a quest for moral balance, see letters to André Suarès, 3 and 28 Jan. 1906, Corres. PC-AS, pp.63, 68.
3. See, for example, letter to Gabriel Frizeau, 3 Feb. 1907, Corres. PC-FJ/GF, p.98, comparing his own situation with that of Francis Jammes and referring to "un esprit de fatalité de bonheur humain qui s'impose à moi malgré toutes les crises". The theme of self-reproach recurs most frequently in his letters to Louis Massignon whom he believed, for some time, to be destined for sainthood: for discussion of this theme see Michel Malicet's introduction to Corres. PC-LM, pp.17-25.

be the co-founder of a coopérative de prières, intended to establish a spiritual union of Catholic writers, intellectuals and others.¹

During this period Claudel reached full maturity as an artist. In December 1905, not long after he had completed Partage de midi, the fictional transposition of his recent experience, he told Gide that he felt he had at last come to terms with the problem of reconciling his art and his religion, for he had realised that the two could coexist in a fertile state of tension.² Despite inevitable moments of self-doubt, he was to show a considerable confidence in his role as a Catholic artist during the years that followed,³ and he was, in fact, to write some of his finest works; notably, L'Annonce faite à Marie, L'Otage, Le Pain dur, and the Cinq Grandes Odes. Moreover, although he was far from reaching a vast public, the staging of L'Annonce in 1912 and L'Otage in 1914 brought him considerable critical acclaim.

These brief biographical details need to be borne in mind as we consider his views on questions of government and society in France during those years. Often enough his remarks on the divisive issues of the period - the Church-State controversy, the education question, the problem of social reform, the power of the centralised State, the parliamentary system - took the form of sweeping, emotional

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1. See Chaigne, op. cit., p.116, for a list of those who joined during the early years (including, among the younger members, Mauriac, Jacques Maritain, and Henri Massis).
 2. Reported by Gide in his Journal, 1889-1939, Paris, Gallimard, (Pléiade), 1948, p.190, (5 Dec. 1905).
 3. See, for example, letters to Gide, 7 Nov. 1905 and 28 Jan. 1909, Corres. PC-AG, pp.54,97; letter to André Suarès, 10 Feb. 1911, Corres. PC-AS, p.160; letter to Jacques Rivière, 7 Nov. 1912, Corres. PC-JR, p.250.

assertions or crude polemic which showed his capacity to react violently against the forces that he regarded as inimical to the wellbeing of his country. However, it would be wrong to suggest that he was constantly obsessed by these questions, for he was an extremely busy man, leading a full, and in many ways satisfying life, divided between a multitude of diverse preoccupations. Moreover, although the evidence which will be examined in the present chapter shows little trace of the reasoned, analytical approach which we shall encounter when discussing his opinions on certain aspects of international relations during those same years, there was, nevertheless, an element of moderation and even acquiescence in his thinking, which to some extent belied the savagery of his condemnations.

B. The Attack on the Church.

Nunc autem derident me juniores tempore quorum non dignabar patres ponere cum canibus gregis meae.

Tous les sectateurs et auteurs des faibles et sottes théories modernes, dont les pères ne se sont même pas élevés à la hauteur des anciens hérésiarques. (- -). Philosophes modernes, non seulement nous ne vous élevons pas à la dignité de chiens, mais pas même vos pères et vos auteurs.

Quorum virtus manuum mihi erat pro nihilo et vita ipsa putabantur indigni; egestate et fame steriles qui rodebant in solitudine, squalentes calamitate et miseria.

La "science" moderne, misérable et dégoûtante, qui grignote des détrituts et des hypothèses mortes et sèches: les rats de bibliothèques, les rongeurs de textes, la lettre morte.¹

These words appear in the opening pages of the diary which Claudel began to keep in September 1904: they form the first sections

1. Jo.I, pp.3-4, (Sept. 1904).

of a commentary on Chapter XXX of the Book of Job, interpreted in the light of the contemporary attack on the Church in France. It was understandable that his catalogue of "plaintes de l'Église persécutée l'an de honte 1904" should begin with a denunciation of modern philosophers, idolaters of science and those who sought to apply scientific methods to other fields of knowledge, since the nineteenth-century heirs of the Enlightenment had done much to create an intellectual climate in which the Church could be widely regarded as a bastion of superstition opposed to the march of progress.¹

As Claudel himself was aware, by the turn of the century the pendulum of philosophical fashion had to some extent swung away from dogmatic faith in all-embracing scientific explanation.² In philosophical circles positivist theories no longer enjoyed the pre-eminence that they had thirty years previously, nor did the early mechanistic theories of evolution, nor the scientism once represented by figures such as Taine, Renan or Marcelin Berthelot. However, while the closing decades of the century had brought to the fore a number of philosophers whose ideas reflected at least a partial reaction against scientific determinism, the challenge had been primarily in the name of neo-criticist or spiritualist theories

1. ibid., p.3. See Henri Verbist, Les Grandes Controverses de l'Église contemporaine de 1789 à nos jours, reprinted, Verviers, Gérard & Co., 1971, pp.118-135 for discussion of the intellectual confrontation between new scientific theories and the Church during the nineteenth century; and Adrien Dansette, Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine, revised edition, Paris, Flammarion, 1965, pp.325-330, 402-412 for the influence of the cult of science on the development of republican anticlericalism.
2. See letter to Gide, 7 Aug. 1903, Corres. PC-AG, p.48: "Ma grande joie est de penser que nous assistons au crépuscule de la Science du XIXe siècle. Toutes ces abominables théories qui ont opprimé notre jeunesse, celle de Laplace, celle de l'évolution, celle des équivalents de force, s'écroulent l'une sur l'autre". Also, letter to André Suarès, 25 July 1907, Corres. PC-AS, p.106, for a later, less exaggerated expression of similar hopes.

which were not themselves compatible with orthodox Catholic belief.¹

The cult of scientific progress had also bequeathed an enduring legacy of dangers to the Church. Within the Catholic fold itself controversy continued to rage around Loisy, Mignot and other modernists who had attempted to incorporate the lessons of science into their theological or exegetical studies, exhibiting an approach which Claudel later described as symptomatic of "la vieille tendance antichrétienne à toujours minimiser le surnaturel, à lui faire la part aussi restreinte que possible, et à se faire une petite religion raisonnable et bourgeoise".² On the other hand, outside the Church, the cause of Reason, Science and Progress was still frequently invoked in the rhetoric of anticlerical publicists and politicians demanding the consolidation of secularism or further curbs on the influence of the clergy.³

Moreover, Claudel saw himself as having formerly been taken in by the claims of atheistic science. On a number of occasions he described this as a crucial factor in the crisis through which he had passed before his return to the Church. At the Lycée Louis-le-Grand he had studied for his baccalauréat en philosophie under Auguste

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1. For discussion of the various schools of thought and the swing away from positivism towards the end of the nineteenth century, see J. Alexander Gunn, Modern French Philosophy: a Study of the Development since Comte, London, Fisher Unwin, 1922; and for the wider reflection of the reaction against positivism among French and other European intellectuals, see H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society, London, Paladin, 1974, pp.33-66.
 2. Letter to Gabriel Frizeau, 25 Sept. 1907, Corres. PC-FJ/GF, p.111. For general discussion of the modernist controversy, see Dansette, *op. cit.*, pp.670-694; Verbist, *op. cit.*, pp.181-187.
 3. See Jean-Marie Mayeur (ed.), La Séparation des Églises et de l'État, Paris, Julliard, pp.32-33.

Burdeau, whose own predilection was for neo-Kantianism. But Claudel himself, by his later account, had inclined to a purely monistic, mechanistic view of the world, in the belief that "tout était soumis aux 'lois' et que ce monde était un enchaînement dur d'effets et de causes que la science allait arriver après-demain à débrouiller parfaitement" - a conviction which had, however, filled him with depression rather than optimism.¹

There may, of course, have been an element of distortion and self-dramatising exaggeration in his recollections, but his desire to join the counter-attack on the excessive claims of nineteenth-century science had been strong enough to make him draw his ideas together in his Art poétique, the set of quasi-philosophical treatises which he completed in 1904. In this work he put forward his own metaphysical theory (certain aspects of which will be discussed later in this chapter) while at the same time attempting to cast doubt on some of the central assumptions underlying scientific determinism - for example, by seeking to show that the same effects do not necessarily imply the same causes in every instance, or by emphasising the disproportion between our limited empirical knowledge and the iron general laws being induced from it.²

1. "Ma conversion", (first published on 10 Oct. 1913), Pr., p.1009. For other remarks referring to the effects of his exposure to the ideas of Taine, Renan, Kant and others, see, for example, letter to Frizeau, 20 Jan. 1904, Corres. PC-FJ/GF, p.33; letter to Jacques Rivière, 12 March 1908, Corres. PC-JR, pp.142-143. Compare with Léon Daudet's retrospective account of the "gavage évolutionniste et criticiste" dispensed by Burdeau, in Daudet, Fantômes et vivants, 1ère série, Paris, Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1914, pp.129-140.

2. See Po., pp.127-135.

Thus, he claimed, "tout cet appareil et les 'lois' qu'on en déduit ne sont que des instruments de critique, des plans de simplification, des moyens d'assimilation intellectuelle".¹

It was an extremely uneven book which constantly vacillated between sweeping rhetorical assertions and rational argument. Nor did it do justice to the positions which it sought to attack. Nevertheless, the writing of it evidently gave him considerable satisfaction and no doubt encouraged his wider hope that France was now witnessing the twilight of nineteenth century scientism and the approach of a new era when even the savants themselves would recognise "la bienheureuse ignorance".² Yet, although he could look for signs of change in this area, it did nothing to alleviate the immediate reality of the political attack on the Church. "Pas un fils de chien qui n'insulte notre Sainte Mère l'Église", he had written in his diary for September 1904:³ politicians, journalists, Protestants, Freethinkers, teachers and a host of others all seemed eager to trample everything that was most sacred.⁴

He was on leave in France at the time when the Chamber finally voted the law separating the Church from the State on 9 December 1905, and he was a witness to the subsequent uproar over the initial moves to enforce re-allocation of Church assets under the control of lay

1. *ibid.*, p.132.

2. Letter to Gide, 7 Aug. 1903, Corres. PC-AG, p.48. This idea is prefigured in La Ville II, (Th.I, p.468), where the scientist, Besme, recounts his discovery of the inadequacy of his knowledge, and announces: "J'ai retrouvé l'Ignorance". Similar themes also appear in the work of a number of other Catholic writers, such as Brunetière and Bourget: see Richard Griffiths, The Reactionary Revolution, London, Constable, 1966, pp.22-28.

3. Jo.I, p.5.

4. See *ibid.*, pp.5-6.

associations cultuelles. In fact, notwithstanding his own delicate position as a civil servant, his anger led him to join other militant Catholics in one of the attempts to physically bar the agents of the State from entering Church buildings to take inventories of their property. In a letter to André Suarès on 1 February 1906 he declared bitterly:

J'ai passé la journée d'hier à Sainte-Clothilde où nous avons essayé de défendre les biens de l'Eglise. Les procédés de nos ennemis ne varient pas. Le premier inventaire est celui qui a été fait des vêtements de Notre-Seigneur au pied de la croix.¹

Even though he believed, in principle, that the Christian should accept persecution as "l'état normal de l'Eglise",² during the years that followed his sense of bitterness was sustained by the news which reached him abroad through the French press. As he remarked to Gide in February 1908, it was as if he were watching his parents being attacked, for "tous les journaux, tous les livres, toutes les revues", seemed to contain nothing but insults against the Church, or "des nouvelles de ruines, de persécutions et d'apostasies".³ On leave in France during the summer of 1909, after finding himself accused of

1. Corres. PC-AS, p.72. For general discussion of the furore surrounding the Inventories, see Mayeur, *op. cit.*, pp.111-145.

2. Letter to Suarès, 25 July 1907, Corres. PC-AS, p.105.

3. Letter to Gide, 6 Feb. 1908, Corres. PC-AG, p.81. See also, for example, *ibid.*, pp.167 (6 March 1911), 190 (9 Jan. 1912); letter to Rivière, 4 Feb. 1909, Corres. PC-JR, p.180; letter to Suarès, 10 Feb. 1911, Corres. PC-AS, pp.159-160; letter to Frizeau, 14 May 1914 (predicting the expulsion of the last religious orders and a new war over education), Corres. PC-FJ/GF, p.268.

clerical machinations at Tientsin, he learned that even the roadside cross at Fère, near his birthplace, had been hacked down.¹ In his more pessimistic moments it must have seemed that nothing holy could escape ruin. Thus, when he received news of heavy flooding in the centre of Paris in January 1910 he was at first tempted to see it as the start of divine retribution. He wrote to André Suarès on 3 February: "Ces inondations de Paris m'ont épouvanté. Comment depuis dix ans un chrétien ne serait-il pas dans une attente continuelle de la colère de Dieu? Cette fois encore il ne s'est agi que du débordement d'un égout (- -)."²

Particularly revealing of his frame of mind was the attitude which he showed towards Charles Péguy when they were first brought into contact. In February 1910 Gide had sent Claudel a copy of Péguy's Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc. Replying to Gide, Claudel remarked that he had approached the book with extreme caution, since he had believed it's author to be "le type du dreyfusard, de l'anarchiste, de l'intellectuel, du Tolstoïisant et autres horreurs".³ At the time of the affaire Claudel himself had been against the Dreyfusist campaign on the grounds that it was undermining

1. See Jo.I, pp.104-105, (Sept. 1909); also *ibid.*, pp.112, (Dec. 1909), 119 (Feb. 1910), 122, (March 1910), for remarks on similar actions by anticlericals.
2. Corres. PC-AS, p.151.
3. Letter to Gide, 21 Feb. 1910, reproduced in Gérard Antoine, "Péguy et Claudel, deux itinéraires politiques et mystiques," Feuillets mensuels d'informations de l'Amitié Charles Péguy, 165, Jan. 1971, p.27. This and other letters on the subject of, or to Péguy are also reprinted in Henri de Lubac and Jean Bastaire, Claudel et Péguy, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1974, p.47 and *passim* thereafter.

the reputation of France in the eyes of the world, and, according to Jules Renard's account, he had made no secret of his anti-semitism.¹ Now, in 1910, he also made a straightforward equation of Dreyfusism with anticlericalism, and claimed to be amazed that a pious work such as the Mystère could have been written by "un destructeur" who had contributed to the attack on the Church.²

When he wrote to Péguy a few months later, after reading Notre jeunesse as well, he reinforced this blanket judgement by totally denying the distinction which Péguy made between Dreyfusist mystique and the Combist politique which had arisen from the perversion of that ideal. For Claudel the issue was simple: "Le combisme est lié au dreyfusisme comme les massacreurs de septembre aux principes de 89."³ There could be no separation, for they constituted "un seul individu organique qu'il est impossible de dissocier".⁴ Given the tense atmosphere of the times, and the intransigent positions of both sides, it was understandable that a man of Claudel's irascible temperament should be so willing to reduce complex issues to the crudest black and white terms. In this aggressive-defensive stance his retrospective assessment of Dreyfusism was an amalgam of themes

1. See Jules Renard, Journal, p.386, (13 Feb. 1900): "Claudel déjeune. Il parle du mal que l'affaire Dreyfus nous a fait à l'étranger. Cet homme intelligent, ce poète. sent le prêtre rageur et de sang âcre. 'Mais la tolérance?' lui dis-je. 'Il y a des maisons pour ça', répond-il. Ils éprouvent je ne sais quelle joie malsaine à s'abêtir et ils en veulent aux autres de cet abêtissement. Ils ne connaissent pas le sourire de la bonté. Il revient à son horreur des juifs, qu'ils ne peuvent voir ni sentir".
2. Letter to Gide, 21 Feb. 1910, in Antoine, art. cit., p.27.
3. Letter to Péguy, 10 Aug. 1910, in *ibid.*, p.29.
4. *id.*

which had been commonplace in the writings of the Right at the time of the Affair; fomented by subversive, socially maladjusted intellectuals with no respect for legitimate authority or loyalty to their country, it had also been the result of a Jewish conspiracy against the French nation.¹

It should perhaps be said here that Claudel's anti-semitism (which he shared with his father and with his sister Camille - both of them admirers of Drumont)² was tempered in his calmer moods by an ambivalent fascination with the Jews. His personal contacts with individual Jews had not, it seems, been antipathetic and he was to assure his half-Jewish friend André Suarès in February 1910: "Au lycée de Bar-le-Duc j'avais beaucoup de camarades juifs et j'étais loin d'avoir pour eux l'aversion profonde que je ressens à l'égard des protestants, bien au contraire, ils m'étaient très sympathiques".³ Moreover, he was already taking the first steps along a somewhat similar path to Léon Bloy in what was to be a lifelong speculation on the meaning of the prophecy of St. Paul which suggested that Israel's rejection of the Messiah, though culpable in itself, had been necessary for Christianity to reach the Gentiles, and that ultimately, when all the Gentiles had been gathered in, the Jews too would be

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1. For the positions and the rhetoric of the anti-Dreyfusards, see Roderick Kedward, The Dreyfus Affair, London, Longmans, 1965, passim.
 2. See Renard, Journal, p.386: "Sa soeur a dans sa chambre un portrait de Rochefort et, sur sa table, La Libre Parole." Also, Claudel, Jo.II, p.754, (Nov. 1950): "Sur Édouard Drumont qu'admiraient tant ma soeur et mon père, voir Barrès, Mes Cahiers, tome XIII, pp.12 et 13."
 3. Letter to Suarès, 3 Feb. 1910, Corres. PC-AS, p.151.

reconciled with Christ.¹ This interest in the supposed Providential destiny of Israel, and the personal contacts which he developed with individual Jews, were to lead him in later life towards pro-Jewish political positions. But as yet that was not the case. In his letter to Péguy he declared his astonishment that "un vrai Français, un soldat de Saint Louis", should have fought for Dreyfus alongside "des gens qui ne sont pas de sa race contre la sienne, avec des gens tout primitifs et imbus de la malédiction de Dieu".² Later, he continued even more forcefully:

Enfin je comprends difficilement que vous niiez l'action de la juiverie dans cette affaire. J'ai vécu dans tous les pays du monde et partout j'ai vu les journaux et l'opinion dans les mains des Juifs. J'étais à Jérusalem en décembre 1899 et j'ai vu au moment de la seconde condamnation la rage de ces punaises à face humaine qui vivent en Palestine des razzias que leurs congénères opèrent sur la chrétienté.³

The very savagery of Claudel's outburst against Péguy's defence of Dreyfusism may not have been entirely unrelated to the fact that his own equivocal position as a fonctionnaire of the anticlerical State normally prevented him - a man who professed to admire Louis Veuillot as "le type du héros"⁴ - from speaking out

1. See letters to Suarès, 3 Jan. 1906 and 3 Feb. 1910, *ibid.*, pp. 62, 151; also, letter to Darius Milhaud, 4 Aug. 1914, *CPC* III, pp. 42-43. For discussion of his fragmentary remarks on the subject during this period, and their relation to themes in *Le Pain dur*, see Denise R. Gamzon, "Claudel rencontre Israël (1905-1920)", *CPC* VII, pp. 71-101; also Jacques Petit, *Bernanos, Bloy, Claudel, Péguy: quatre écrivains catholiques face à Israël*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1972, *passim*, for a useful general discussion of Claudel's approach to the Jews, and comparison with that of other Catholic writers.
2. Letter to Péguy, 10 Aug. 1910, in Antoine, *art. cit.* p. 29.
3. *ibid.*, p. 30.
4. Letter to Gide, 2 Feb. 1910, *Corres. PC-AG*, p. 118.

in public controversy, and even made him feel obliged to publish his play, L'Otage, in semi-anonymity for fear that its possible interpretation as an attack on the Revolution might attract the unwelcome attention of his superiors.¹

In 1912, however, he was offered the opportunity to fight back, albeit within a small arena, without running too much risk of losing his livelihood. In June of that year Louis Massignon introduced him to the abbé Daniel Fontaine, former confessor to Huysmans, and priest of Notre-Dame-Auxiliatrice at Clichy. At that time Fontaine was involved in the production of a local newspaper, the Journal de Clichy (describing itself as an "Organe républicain indépendant d'intérêt local") which was locked in battle with the anticlerical Réveil municipal de Clichy (the "Organe de l'Union des groupes radicaux, radicaux-socialistes et socialistes indépendants"). The situation was thus a classic one for the period, with the two factions ranged in bitter opposition to each other, acting out in microcosm the conflicts which divided the nation as a whole. As a result of his meeting with Fontaine, Claudel was to enter the field and, thanks to Massignon's help, was able to publish a considerable

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1. For references to his anxiety concerning L'Otage, see letters to Gide, 17 Feb., 2 June, 17 June, 16 Sept., 20 Oct. 1910, and 27 Feb. 1911. Corres. PC-AG, pp. 121, 137, 140, 153, 154, 164. Later, after being reassured by Berthelot, he published the play as a book (see letter to Gide, 6 March 1911, ibid., p.167). His sense of being under threat at the Ministry had also been an important factor in making him refuse to allow La Jeune Fille Violaine to be staged in 1909 (see letter to Gide, 18 Feb. 1909, ibid., p.99), and also made him wary of being drawn into literary controversies (see letter to Gide, 17 June 1910, ibid., p.141: "Ah, si je n'étais fonctionnaire et père de famille ... mais tout le monde a ses raisons pour ne pas attacher le grelot").

number of political articles in the Journal without having to reveal his identity to the readership.¹

As we shall see later, the content of these articles was not restricted to attacks on present anticlerical policy and its supporters. But it was in this context that he produced some of his most venomous invective against the Radicals, whose selfishness, vanity, ignorance and contempt for the suffering of others he evoked in damning terms.² Likewise, even the conservative président du Conseil, Raymond Poincaré, was denounced as harshly as any other enemy to Claudel's working-class readers when it was announced that he had condoned further closures of Church orphanages. Claudel depicted him above all as a bourgeois hypocrite, wining and dining, attending meetings at the Académie Française, cynically courting Catholic notables such as Albert de Mun, while condemning the children of the poor to unbearable suffering. The populist tone of this attack may be judged from the following paragraphs:

1. For background to Claudel's collaboration with Fontaine, see Chroniques, pp.11-27; his correspondence with Fontaine in ibid., p.99 ff.; and Corres. PC-LM, pp.172-185, 198-201. Apart from the first two articles, which were published unsigned, the rest were signed "M" so that Massignon could cover for Claudel in the event of attempts to discover the author's identity. In a letter to Massignon on 10 July 1912, (Corres. PC-LM, p.173), Claudel at first professed: "Je ne puis dire que ce genre de littérature me ravisse. Mais enfin je la prends comme une mortification. Et je ne puis laisser sans y répondre aucune indication de la Providence". However, when Massignon later offered to take over from him, Claudel seemed reluctant to give up a task which he probably enjoyed more than he was willing to admit: see letter to Massignon, 2 Aug. 1912, (ibid., p.182): "Je vous cède la plume bien volontiers pour le complément de coups à porter! Mais ne croyez pas que le temps me manque. Je n'en ai que trop, hélas! et je suis heureux de faire un peu de milice pour l'Église."
2. See "Les Plaisirs de M. Poincaré", (11 Jan. 1913), Chroniques, p.34, where Claudel remarked, inter alia: "Il a fallu en France des siècles d'envie, d'avarice, d'égoïsme, de vanité souffrante et comprimée, de haine consciente et tenace, des générations de basochiens, de jansénistes, de jacobins et de bousingots pour produire enfin ce miracle de méchanceté et de sottise qu'est le Radical pur."

Ah! tenez, si je pouvais, je vous proposerais un marché. Je vous dirais: Pas de prêtres, pas de religieuses pour les riches. Fermez la Madeleine et Saint-Augustin où vous mariez pieusement vos filles au son de l'orgue et à la fumée de l'encens. Démolissez Notre-Dame! Abattez ces cliniques et ces maisons religieuses où vos amis vont chercher soin, quand leur vessie ou leurs intestins gorgés de bons vins et de viandes fines refusent de fonctionner. Mais je vous en supplie, laissez Dieu aux pauvres! Laissez un consolateur aux malades, laissez un père aux orphelins; laissez leurs mères aux enfants, n'éteignez pas ces dernières lumières, ne désespérez pas les âmes innocentes. Car c'est la bonté incréée elle-même qui l'a dit: "Celui qui scandalise, celui qui désespère un de ces petits, il vaudrait mieux qu'il fût jeté à la mer avec la meule d'un âne à son cou!

Oui, d'un âne, Monsieur l'Académicien. C'est écrit. Avec l'instrument dont se sert le quadrupède Radical pour sa détestable meunerie.¹

Nor did Claudel neglect the occult forces behind the politicians. The power of Freemasonry in political circles had long been known and detested by Catholics, especially after the affaire des fiches of 1904.² It was not a subject on which Claudel had dwelt in his earlier writings, but in his articles for the Journal he painted Freemasonry in the most sordid light. He produced two articles viciously satirising the activities of the local Lodge at Clichy,³ and another piece in which he compared the open, joyful nature of Catholicism to the secretive, underhand character of Masonry, with its furtive meetings at night "sous la présidence de quelque Juif" to vent its hatred in vile machinations against the Church.⁴

1. "Les Plaisirs de M. Poincaré", *ibid.*, p.35.

2. For discussion of the affaire des fiches, see Dansette, *op. cit.*, pp.602-604.

3. See "Le Rêve de M. Durillon", (2 articles, 3 and 10 May 1913), *ibid.*, pp.59-63.

4. "Les Cloches de Pâques", (5 April 1913), *ibid.*, p.52.

Some mention also needs to be made of the five long articles which he devoted to the education question under the title, "La Faillite de l'École laïque". It is useful to remember here that in the years following the Separation the long-standing debate over secular education had entered a new phase. Although Catholics and their allies were by then largely resigned to the continued existence of State primary schooling, their protest had subsequently turned on the secular moral code which was propagated in these institutions. With Barrès leading a vigorous press campaign, and the French episcopate proscribing certain textbooks in the name of a call for impartial teaching, there had been a mounting hue and cry from the Right against the rise of juvenile delinquency and sexual laxity, while the Centre and Left had fought back under the banner of défense laïque.¹

Claudé had been aware of the parliamentary debates provoked by the controversy. He had written to Jammes on the subject in January 1910, and had noted bitterly in his diary around the same time: "Discussion de l'École laïque à la Chambre. Étrange malédiction de la raison sans Dieu qui ne sait plus ce que c'est que le bien et le mal. (- -). Ils ne savent plus parler aux petits enfants et sont confondus par eux".² As for his opinion of the subsequent campaign for défense laïque, it had been summarised in his diary in September

1. See Mona Ozouf, L'École, L'Église et la République 1871-1914, Paris, Armand Colin, 1963, pp.219-255.

2. Jo.I, p.116, (Jan. 1910). See also, letter to Jammes, 26 Jan. 1910, Corres. PC-FJ/GF, p.171; and, letter to Adrien Mithouard, 7 Feb. 1910, BSPC, 66, p.2.

1912: "Défense laïque, défense républicaine. Après 30 ans de persecutions il est exaltant de ne les entendre parler que de défense. La position de l'enfer est défensive".¹

When he came to write his articles for the Journal, his aim was to show that secular education was both a failure in practical terms, and an unqualified evil, as shown by its consequences, the quality of its teachers and the very nature of its doctrine. As to the first of these accusations, Claudel was a faithful echo of the charges commonly made by the Right at that time: illiteracy was spreading rather than decreasing and the juvenile crime rate had risen dramatically.² Moreover, the large number of abortions, the spread of Malthusianism, and the rise in desertions from the army could all be traced to the process of public demoralisation resulting from thirty years of atheistic teaching.³

Claudel's technique when making these, and other accusations was to intersperse his own subjective comments with quotations from teachers, educationists, and even philosophers. These, when taken out of context, might seem to be confessions of the inadequacy of the system as a whole: it could thus appear condemned by its own admission. So, when attacking the concept of secularism itself, he produced a series of short quotes from men like Henri Poincaré,

1. Jo.I, pp.238-239, (Sept. 1912).

2. See "La Faillite de l'École laïque", (1), (1 Feb. 1913), *ibid.*, pp.38-39.

3. See "La Faillite ...", (2) and (4), (8 Feb. and 1 March 1913), *ibid.*, pp.40-41, 46.

Renan, Boutroux or Le Dantec apparently pointing to the impossibility of devising a true secular morality.¹ He also cited the "principal organe des Instituteurs laïcs", in which a writer had made a statement: "Nous ne savons pas ce que c'est qu'un honnête homme".² And when faced with the question of what was to become of public morality and society as a whole, the writer had supposedly replied: "Elles deviendront ce qu'elles pourront".³ In other words - Claudel maintained - there was no such thing as a morale laïque, hence the fact that every congress of free-thinkers still debated "la constitution d'une morale laïque".⁴ However, lest his message become too academic for his readers, Claudel also stated the issues in starker terms. With a burst of impassioned rhetoric not unworthy of Veuillot's lineage, he declared:

Il y va du salut de la France, il y va de l'âme des pauvres enfants empoisonnés par de sinistres malfaiteurs qui, de leur propre aveu, ne savent ce qu'ils disent. Entre les puissances du bien et celles du mal, entre le matérialisme et la religion, entre les doctrines qui font de l'homme une bête brute et celles qui lui révèlent sa mission et sa dignité, une terrible bataille s'est livrée au siècle dernier. Aujourd'hui la bataille est gagnée, tout le misérable échafaudage élevé par les philosophes positivistes et naturalistes s'est écroulé avec bruit. Il n'y a plus un homme éclairé en dehors des universitaires, des Juifs et des savants d'État, qui croie aujourd'hui ce que croyaient autrefois un Victor Hugo ou un Michelet. Mais si tous les gens intelligents et cultivés sont revenus à la religion ou, du moins, au respect des

1. See "La Faillite ...", (3), (22 Feb. 1913), *ibid.*, pp.44-45.

2. "La Faillite ...", (4), *ibid.*, p.46.

3. *id.*

4. "La Faillite ...", (3), *ibid.*, p.45.

choses religieuses, il reste encore la masse énorme des primaires, des demi-savants, des minus-habens, des Homais d'arrière-loges. Ce sont ces arriérés qui remplacent aujourd'hui ces 'pagani', ces villageois incultes qui furent les derniers tenants des vieilles idoles.¹

In addition to the polemic and the crude sophistries, he did offer a number of more solid, traditional Catholic arguments for dismissing the notion of secular morality. It could be no more than "un code plat de prescriptions hygiéniques", because it contained no element of transcendency.² That is to say, it offered nothing beyond the human to inspire the individual to sacrifice immediate gratification for a higher goal; nothing that was "plus puissant que ces passions formidables dont l'homme doit tout de même arriver à se rendre le maître".³ Only the hypothetical interest of Society or Humanity was given as an incentive for man to act in a way that was against his nature - by working, or refraining from stealing and acting violently, for instance. Furthermore, apart from legal sanctions, it could impose no measures to make people restrain their baser instincts.⁴ In other words, atheistic humanism was condemned on the implicit assumption that human nature was innately prone to sin and was not perfectible.

The teachers themselves were treated by Claudel with a classic mixture of abuse and hollow sympathy. On the one hand, they were

1. id.

2. "La Faillite ...", (4), *ibid.*, p.47.

3. id.

4. "La Faillite ...", (4), *ibid.*, p.48.

portrayed as entirely lacking the altruistic dedication necessary for shaping the minds of the young, and were accused of being obsessed with base considerations of pay and working conditions. The only question which really interested them was "la pièce de cent sous", and even the traitorous anti-militarist declarations of the left-wing Fédération des Instituteurs Syndicalistes could be seen as a means of blackmail to extract more money from the Government.¹ On the other hand, the teachers were described as being underpaid by the corrupt, exploitative State,² and they were to be pitied for being forced to carry out the impossible task of purveying "la morale de son et de sciure de bois" in the schools.³ In concluding his last article on the question he appealed to them to recognise that their real enemies were not the Catholics but the "théoriciens pédantesques" and the "saltimbanques de la politique" who were using the teachers to further their own ambitions.⁴

From what has been seen so far it will be apparent that although Claudel was not inclined to sever his own connection with the State during these years of crisis, the views which he expressed in reaction to the attack on the Church were an apt reflection of a polarised political climate in which both sides tended to believe that they were fighting a battle for Light against Darkness, and to scent heinous conspiracies between the forces to which they were

1. "La Faillite ...", (2), *ibid.*, p.41.

2. See "La Faillite ...", (1), *ibid.*, p.39.

3. "La Faillite ...", (2), *ibid.*, pp.41-42.

4. "La Faillite ...", (5), (8 March 1913), *ibid.*, pp.48-49.

opposed. However, it should be remembered that when Claudel came to write for the Journal he was contributing to a paper which was involved in a struggle against heavy odds in a predominantly left-wing suburb where anticlericalism had most of the advantages on its side. Claudel had once written to Gide that, whilst the Church did not advocate violence, it had a duty, as the possessor of the sole, eternal truth, to protect its members from those who sought to lead them astray. That is undoubtedly what he considered himself to be doing when he wrote his articles for the Journal.

C. The Revolution and the Republic

It is probable that the impact of the Church-State controversy played an important part in turning Claudel's thoughts to the Revolution, of which the dominant political forces of the Third Republic so proudly declared themselves the inheritors. As was his habit, he did not seek to formulate his ideas in the shape of a coherent critique. In his references to the subject there was little sign of the type of reasoned arguments which had been employed by anti-revolutionary thinkers such as de Maistre, Bonald, Taine, or - at the time when Claudel was writing - Maurras. However, although his comments on the Revolution and its heritage were sporadic, fragmentary and often confused, they were nevertheless revealing of the emotional reaction - which he shared with so many Catholic writers of the period¹ - against the moral climate of contemporary French society, and his distaste for the political system by which his country was being governed.

1. For general background discussion of this diffuse reaction in Catholic literature, see Richard Griffiths, *op. cit.*, especially pp.225-287.

Although Claudel felt a horror of "la Carmagnole autour de l'échafaud",¹ and a loathing of the "monstres au coeur sec et froid"² who had led the Revolution, he was prepared to concede that it had perhaps been justified in so far as it expressed a desire to form a rational, intelligible society which would no longer be based purely on the blind force of tradition and acceptance of historical precedent. But he also held to the classic anti-revolutionary view that whether or not some of its aspirations might have been legitimate, it had been led too far, and in the wrong direction, by the rationalistic desire to create a new society on the basis of a tabula rasa.³ Thus, in his diary for August 1908, he wrote:

La Révolution a eu ceci de légitime, que le citoyen a voulu faire partie d'un ensemble social raisonnable et explicable, ne dépendant plus uniquement du fait et de la tradition. C'est ce que j'appelle la révolution contre le hasard. L'erreur n'a pas été de vouloir être gouverné selon la raison, mais selon une raison incomplète, de vouloir créer au lieu de comprendre.⁴

As he told André Suarès in February 1911, when again making comments to the same effect, the problem was that the Revolution had sacrificed, "la place du coeur, du dévouement féodal d'homme", and had created "une espèce de mysticisme rationaliste", which had become intolerable.⁵

1. Jo.I, p.43, (March 1907).

2. Letter to Suarès, 1 Feb. 1911, Corres. PC-AS, p.157. See also letter to Suarès, 10 Feb. 1911, ibid., p.160; Jo.I, p.59, (May 1908).

3. For discussion of the central themes of the anti-revolutionary tradition in France, see Marie-Madeleine Martin, Les Doctrines sociales en France et l'évolution de la société française du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours, Paris, Conquistador, 1963, pp.171-198.

4. Jo.I, p.68. See also ibid., p.82, (Jan. 1909).

5. Letter to Suarès, 10 Feb. 1911, Corres. PC-AS, p.159.

In line with this general belief was his denunciation of the deformed conception of justice which he considered to have impoverished the spirit of French society since the time of the Revolution. He saw this new justice - epitomised during the nineteenth century by Proudhon and Michelet¹ - as being based on the misguided conviction that its source must lie in man alone, without reference to God, and that the rule of law, rather than Christian moral imperatives was the basis for a proper social order. For Claudel, as a Catholic, any notion of social relations which was not derived directly from Catholic teaching on the nature of man's relationship with God was necessarily inadequate. Moreover, he felt a powerful distaste for the sterile legalism of the Revolution, with its obsessive worship of impersonal written codes and formal legal rights. It was with these assumptions in mind that he wrote to Arthur Fontaine on 30 May 1910 deriding "la loi écrite, la justice morte et impersonnelle que la Révolution a ramené des temps de Tibère et de Néron", and pointing out that there could be no true community outside the Church: separated from his spiritual bonds, the individual could only remain "un isolé", incapable of doing good for others because his own life was deprived of all direction and meaning.²

More specifically, the demand for a purely human justice enshrined in the law (associated in his thoughts, no doubt, with the

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1. Claudel refers sweepingly to Proudhon's, De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église on two occasions in the context of this question: see "Propositions sur la Justice", (L'Indépendance, 15 May 1911), OC XV, p.160; letter to Sylvain Pitt, 4 July 1910, ibid., p.166. Michelet is mentioned by name only once in this context, and with no reference to a particular work: see Jo.I, p.110. However, it seems likely that Claudel had some familiarity with Michelet's Histoire de la Révolution française, see below p.44, note 2.
 2. OC XV, p.321. For variations on the theme of isolation outside the Church, see, for example, letters to Gide, 3 March and 30 July 1908, Corres. PC-AG, pp.84, 86; letter to Piero Jahier, 10 Sept. 1912, in Henri Giordan, Paul Claudel en Italie: avec la correspondance Paul Claudel-Piero Jahier, Paris, Klincksieck, 1975, p.109.

tyranny of scientific reason and the iron, mechanical laws which it posited) put him in mind of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, where the apostle had preached that faith, not law, was the source of righteousness and that, since the coming of Christ, men were called to live under Grace, serving God and their fellows freely in the way of the spirit rather than the old way of the written code.¹ Hence, for example, in his diary for October 1909, a set of notes on "l'idée de justice qui fait le fondement de la Révolution (Proudhon, Michelet)," included the words:

Elle fait disparaître la liberté et la gratuité de la société humaine. Je vis dans un état perpétuel de banqueroute. Le Christ a libéré l'homme de la Loi (S. Paul), la voici de nouveau sur nos épaules, non plus la Loi de Dieu, mais celle des hommes, comme au temps de l'Empire et du Droit Romain. -Contra, la parabole du débiteur exigeant, à qui le maître réclame cent mines et qui fait rentrer lui-même ses créances. "Que votre justice soit supérieure à celle des Pharisiens!" - "Cherchez premièrement le royaume de Dieu et le reste vous sera donné par surcroît".²

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1. Discussion of this question occupies nearly the whole of the epistle.
 2. Jo.I, p.110. See also, letter to Sylvain Pitt, 4 July 1910, OC XV, p.167; "Propositions sur la Justice", ibid., p.165. The same idea is voiced in L'Otage by the counter-revolutionary aristocrat, Georges de Coûfontaine, (Th. II, p.247). See J.-P. Kempf and Jacques Petit, Études sur la "Trilogie" de Claudel (1): "L'Otage", Paris, Minard, (Archives Claudéliennes, 5), 1966, p.8, where it is pointed out that this idea seems to have been inspired particularly by arguments in Michelet's Histoire, in which the latter claims that the "fiction" of the ancien régime had been "de mettre l'Amour à la place de la Loi" (Paris, NRF, Pléiade edition, vol.I, 1939, p.54) and that the Revolution had been "la réaction tardive de la justice contre le gouvernement de la faveur, et la religion de la grâce" (ibid., p.30). It is interesting to note that Michelet also refers specifically to St. Paul when arguing that the nature of the Catholic faith is incompatible with true justice (see ibid., pp.26-27).

Likewise, in an incoherent outburst to Sylvain Pitt against "le nouveau droit révolutionnaire qui a remplacé l'ancienne et naïve coutume", he claimed that the new principle allowed no room for gratuity, no awareness of real human needs, no spirit of giving in imitation of God's Grace.¹ This left precious little scope for human relations to be motivated by anything other than material self-interest, and, he claimed, this mentality had spread through the whole of French society, damning the rich and, what was worse, corrupting the poor.²

A further aspect of his attack on the sterility of the modern conception of justice was to be illustrated in a rather garbled set of "Propositions sur la Justice" which were published in Georges Sorel's periodical, L'Indépendance, on 15 May 1911. Part of this article was devoted to outlining his own ideal of justice, which will be discussed later in this chapter. But first he set out to show the inadequacy of what he termed "la Justice négative" - by which he meant, primarily, the notions of contract and exchange - as a basis for social relations.³ He claimed that his article had been inspired in particular by his reaction to Proudhon's De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise, and to "cette Justice profane et découronnée qui du livre de Proudhon s'est échappée sur nos places

1. See letter to Pitt, 4 July 1910, OC XV, pp.166-167.

2. See *ibid.*, p.167.

3. *ibid.*, p.160. Compare the words of Georges de Coûfontaine in L'Otage (Th.II, p.248), denouncing "ces hommes de loi qui pensent que tout peut se régler par un contrat". The themes of exchange, contract, law and justice recur frequently in various guises throughout Claudel's dramatic works: for a recent interpretation, see Josée van de Ghinste, La Recherche de la justice dans le théâtre de Paul Claudel, Paris, Nizet, 1980.

publiques".¹ However, he did not concern himself with the details of Proudhon's theories nor indeed with those of any other writer. Instead he gave himself an easier target by taking the notion of contract in the abstract, defining it in negative, legalistic terms, and linking it in turn with the mentality of contemporary society as a whole.

He defined contractual obligation as an extension of the purely negative principle that one should not do to others what one would not want done to oneself, and hence that one should return what was owed. He asserted that neither this nor any other principle of natural justice offered a source of positive action, in the sense of initiating gratuitous acts of kindness to others or allowing repayment of "les bienfaits que nous avons reçus à titre purement gratuit et sans que nous puissions nous en passer, de Dieu, de nos parents, de nos amis, et même de la Société; et dont nous ne pouvons absolument pas rendre l'équivalent".²

The contract itself was a limited instrument of balance for cases where "le bien que nous avons reçu est le corrélatif d'un autre bien que nous nous engageons à procurer".³ In any case, it was necessarily an approximate instrument which could never achieve a perfect balance, since there could be no absolute equivalence between the services or goods exchanged, because the subjective human needs of

1. OC XV, p.160.

2. ibid., p.162.

3. ibid., p.161.

of the parties to the exchange were never comparable. It was merely an artificial tool suited to dealing with conventional values assigned to objects or services for practical transactions contingent on the fulfilment of agreed conditions, and therefore of restricted duration. But it was, he implied, an apt expression of the mentality of contemporary society:

Par l'échange les deux parties conviennent simplement de se libérer de toute obligation ultérieure. Bien loin de relier les hommes, la Justice ainsi comprise les sépare et bien loin de créer des obligations elle les éteint. L'idée populaire de la Justice est de "ne devoir rien à personne". Suprême éloge: "C'est un homme qui ne doit rien à personne".¹

In so far as these observations were prompted by Proudhon's ideas in particular, they were obviously a long way from even scratching the surface of the latter's immensely rich theories, except to the extent that Proudhon did indeed view social relations in terms of exchange and contract (though on the basis of a positive moral theory, not the purely negative principle which Claudel had defined).² On the other hand, his animosity towards the author of De la Justice was surely stimulated by another factor besides his view of Proudhon as a representative of the general post-revolutionary tendency to

1. *ibid.*, p.163.

2. See, for example, Proudhon's definition of the basic social contract in De la justice ... Oeuvres complètes (ed. by C. Bouglé and H. Moysset), Vol.VIII(1), Paris, Marcel Rivière, 1930, p.419: "Il existe donc un contrat ou constitution de la société, donné a priori par les formes de la conscience, qui sont la liberté, la dignité, la raison, la justice, et par les rapports de voisinage et d'échange que soutiennent entre eux les individus. C'est l'acte par lequel des hommes, se formant en groupe, déclarent, ipso facto, l'identité et la solidarité de leurs dignités respectives, se reconnaissent réciproquement et au même titre souverains, et se portent l'un pour l'autre garants". For wider discussion of Proudhon's writings on the subject of justice, see Robert L. Hoffman, Revolutionary Justice: The Social and Political Theory of P.-J. Proudhon, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1972, especially pp.226-259, 283-308.

substitute lifeless formal or theoretical mechanisms for living Christian ideals. He could scarcely have been unaware that Proudhon's whole approach to the question of justice was based on the idea of equality, and was formulated in opposition to the traditionally anti-egalitarian social teaching of the Church.¹ Certainly, Claudel himself rejected the ideal of justice when it was linked with egalitarianism. In a letter to Gabriel Frizeau on 1 May 1908 he aired this view in a curious mixture of metaphysical imagery implying the inadequacy of any ideal of earthly justice, crude echoes of Darwinism, and an appeal to the Catholic value of hierarchy:

La nature de l'homme condamne toutes les utopies fondées sur la justice, car la seule justice qui puisse être faite à la nature humaine, c'est l'attribution de l'infini. Et pas l'homme seulement, mais le pou lui-même par la reproduction de ses myriades, si on le laissait faire, il occuperait l'infini. Le socialisme est un paradis de bêtes châtrées privées du ton le plus intense, réduites à leurs fonctions les plus ignobles. Comment ne comprend-on pas la céleste doctrine de la religion? Il me semble qu'il doit y avoir une joie immense à voir des êtres supérieurs à soi. De même qu'il y a un immense bonheur paternel à rompre le pain aux êtres qui vous sont confiés. Et il est certain que la société actuelle n'est qu'une image affreuse de cette céleste république. Mais enfin on n'enfreindra pas la loi sacrée de l'inégalité parce qu'elle est celle de la vie. Toute civilisation est fondée sur la lutte, et sur la prédominance juste et nécessaire qui doit appartenir aux meilleurs.²

Be that as it may, although Claudel was hostile to Proudhon's own theory of social justice, he was quite prepared to make use of him

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1. The notion of (approximate) equality is the lynchpin of the whole work, but see especially, Oeuvres complètes, Vol.VIII(2), 1931, pp.1-136, for its concrete application to the economic realm in opposition to the doctrines and practice of the Church. For discussion of the idea of equality within the wider context of Proudhon's work as a whole, see Hoffman, op.cit.,passim.
 2. Letter to Frizeau, 1 May 1908, Corres.PC-FJ/GF, pp.130-131. See also Jo.I,p.110; and compare, in La Ville I, (Th.I,p.317), the contemptuous words of Avare to the utopian socialist Pasmé, after Avare and his lieutenants have emerged as tyrants following the destruction of Paris: "Ne comprends-tu pas/Qu'une justice parfaite pour chacun,c'est qu'il s'approprie/Tout le reste?Nous l'avons fait".

as a weapon with which to attack an earlier political thinker whose name was indelibly associated with the Revolution. The particular occasion was provided by the official bicentenary of Rousseau's birth, which was celebrated by the Republic at the end of June 1912 amid great enthusiasm from the Left and predictable acrimony from the Right.¹ In the Journal de Clichy, to follow up a piece of venomous personal polemic against Rousseau, based on sordid details from the Confessions,² Claudel reproduced "deux fortes pages" which he had extracted from Proudhon's Idée de la Révolution au XIXe siècle.³

In the extract used by Claudel, Proudhon had denounced Rousseau's individualism as the primary element underlying social conceptions which were a recipe for conflict, because they were based on a denial of the good which could be intrinsic in society. Proudhon had also derided Rousseau's overriding tendency to think in meaningless abstractions - abstract political rights which left fundamental economic questions untouched, and a view of the people as an abstract entity, rather than a living society based on concrete needs. Moreover, he accused Rousseau of propagating political ideas which fostered division and injustice. Having posed the principle of popular sovereignty and

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1. For a brief discussion of the controversy surrounding the celebrations, see Eugen Weber, The Nationalist Revival in France 1905-1914, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959, p.109.
 2. See "L'Exemple de Jean-Jacques Rousseau", (20 July 1912), Chroniques, pp.31-32, and "Encore Jean-Jacques", (10 Aug. 1912), ibid., p.33. The first of these articles had been written in reply to a eulogy of Rousseau by Georges Moitet in the left-wing Réveil municipal de Clichy on 7 July 1912, and Claudel's second article was a rejoinder to the reply published in the Réveil on 28 July: see Corres. PC-LM, pp.173, 179-180.
 3. See letters to Massignon 10 July and 2 Aug. 1912, Corres. PC-LM, pp.173, 182, for references to the extract. Claudel admitted in the second of these letters that he himself knew little of Rousseau's ideas, having only read La Nouvelle Héloïse and the Confessions.

law as the expression of the general will (itself a meaningless abstraction) Rousseau had changed tack by substituting the will of the majority and, on the pretext that the nation could not be permanently occupied with public affairs, had argued the need for elected representatives to legislate on behalf of the people. Rousseau had, thereby, produced a blueprint for tyranny where, instead of being ordered on the basis of direct personal transactions, the people were subjected to the oppression of a numerical majority and the exploitation of parasitic elected representatives.¹

Obviously there was a strong element of demagogy in Claudel's use of one revolutionary thinker to condemn another. However, he was following an established precedent when he used Proudhon in this way, for the latter's hatred of Rousseau, and of parliamentary democracy, was one of the factors which had allowed the Action Française group to adopt him as one of the spiritual forebears of the counter-revolution.² Moreover, Claudel himself had no love for the parliamentary system. As he had remarked in his diary for January 1911, when taking the principle of democratic consent to taxation as an example of "langage archi-faux et démodé" which France had inherited from the Revolution, the nature of the electorate, the system of majorities, the impossibility of choosing an adequate representative, and the whole process of parliamentary wheeling and dealing made it impossible for the individual to exercise any real right of consent.³

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1. Published as "Sur le contrat social", in Journal de Clichy, 27 July 1912, (not reproduced in Chroniques). For the context of this extract in Proudhon's books, see Oeuvres complètes, Vol.II, (ed. by C. Bouglé and H. Moysset), Paris, Marcel Rivière, 1924, p.191.
 2. See Zeev Sternhell, La Droite révolutionnaire, 1885-1914, Paris, Seuil, 1978, pp.391-392.
 3. Jo.I, p.183, (Jan. 1911).

The elections were merely "une mêlée immonde, une image fictive de la guerre", and the people were simply being taken in by an illusion.¹

Claudé took up similar themes in his articles for the Journal de Clichy, where he placed a particular emphasis on the corruption and duplicity of the politicians, as he sounded the battle-cries: "le Régime parlementaire, c'est le régime des appétits",² or "c'est toute l'armée de la Révolution, c'est tout le parlementarisme, c'est tout ce régime d'écrivassiers et d'hommes de loi qu'il s'agit de liquider".³ The parliamentary system, he claimed, gave a parasitic minority the opportunity to maintain their privileged position by preventing the people from exercising any real right of control over their own affairs. The electoral process, "une opération compliquée de magie blanche" was designed to conceal the reality of the situation and offer an image of participation without any substance.⁴ In other words, the nation was being subjected to a massive confidence trick, while the politicians formed a class apart, trading in words, selling their services to the highest bidder, but maintaining a façade of irreconcilable party oppositions in order to hide their common aim of exploiting the electorate.⁵ Claudé was thus a faithful echo of charges which were commonly levelled at the Republic by the extreme Right - for instance, in 1899, Maurras had pronounced the following

1. id.

2. "La Faillite de l'École laïque, (1), Chroniques, p.39.

3. "La Nouvelle Jeunesse", (9 Aug. 1913), *ibid.*, p.72.

4. "Parlementarisme", (5 July 1913), Chroniques, p.66.

5. See *ibid.*, pp.66-67. These ideas are prefigured in Tête d'Or II, Th.I, pp. 229-238, in the satirical portrayal of the group of professional politicians who surround the aged King and attempt to usurp the fruits of Tête d'Or's victory.

judgement on the parliamentary system and its personnel:

... L'État est lui-même impuissant à remplir sa fonction d'État. Il est abandonné aux représentants du pouvoir législatif. Les ministres ne sont que les commis et serviteurs des sénateurs et députés et ne songent qu'à leur obéir pour défendre leur portefeuille. (...). Une classe de citoyens, profondément méprisée du pays entier, fait métier, fait commerce de l'intrigue et de l'influence; sénateurs, députés, courtiers électoraux, c'est hasard si l'on trouve un caractère indépendant sur mille individus de cette profession.¹

In Claudel's articles, denunciation of the chaos and corruption of the parliamentary system was coupled with an attack on the power of the centralised State - another of the habitual targets of the Right² - which he linked in turn with warnings to his working-class readers against the lure of socialism. The State was portrayed as despotic, impersonal and largely indifferent to the pressing social problems of the moment. Here, too, Claudel introduced the idea of conspiracy, for the extension of the power of the State since the Revolution could be depicted as the result of a process consciously fostered by professional politicians in order to prevent the people from organising their own destiny through the development of associations - natural, professional and religious - which allowed the growth of a proper sense of social responsibility. Hence, he asserted:

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1. Charles Maurras, "Dictateur et Roi", reproduced in his Petit Manuel de l'enquête sur la monarchie, Versailles, Bibliothèque des Oeuvres Politiques, 1928, pp.208-209.
 2. See, for example, *ibid.*, p.206, for Maurras's denunciations of this "César anonyme, tout-puissant mais irresponsable et inconscient"; also, Maurice Barrès, Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, Paris, Félix Juven, 1902, pp.483-507.

...la Révolution, faite par des hommes de loi, a vu d'un mauvais oeil tous les groupements qui pouvaient constituer un centre de vie quelconque étranger à l'omnipotence de l'État. Elle a fait disparaître les congrégations, les corporations, etc. Le seul fait de s'associer était puni par la législation de 1793. Seule la famille était une association naturelle si forte qu'elle résistait à l'attaque des principes révolutionnaires. Aussi c'est contre la famille que toute la législation issue des principes de 1789 est tournée.¹

He further argued that the low birth rate in France was not only a consequence of dechristianisation, accompanied by inevitable moral decline, but also the result of deliberate policies aimed against the fathers of large families - for example, the crippling laws of inheritance, taxation and divorce.² Similarly, with regard to professional associations, present day republicans were following the example of their forebears by limiting the power of the trade unions through such means as refusing them the right to own property. The aim of the politicians was to reduce them to mere debating circles "à l'image de la grande parlote au bord de la Seine".³

From these accusations, it was but a short step to denouncing the danger of socialism, which he defined as an extension of the evils already fostered by the existing political system. The parliamentary régime was built on envy, idleness and cowardice. These vices would be infinitely extended under a socialist system. On the one hand, the pursuit of equality could only lead to the institutionalisation of mediocrity, "la négation des inégalités salutaires fondées sur le

1. "Les Familles nombreuses", (2 Aug. 1913), Chroniques, p.69.

2. See *ibid.*, pp.68-69.

3. "Parlementarisme", *ibid.*, p.67.

travail, l'intelligence et la prévoyance".¹ It would mean the end of individual striving, since this was a reproach to the ignorance and idleness of the majority. It would bring the end of competition - itself the key to progress - with the inevitable consequence of stagnation and reduction of all to the level of the most inept. On the other hand, basing himself on the assumption that men will always give in to tyranny rather than fight it, Claudel warned of the further extension of the State's power to every area of life. It would always be easier to depend on the State for one's personal wellbeing rather than struggling for it by "des efforts personnels ou collectifs".² In other words, for Claudel, socialism meant the State omnipotent and omnipresent, impersonally run by bureaucratic committees and delegations, "le régime des sycophantes".³

D. The Need for Moral Unity

In a recent study of conservative ideologies Noël O'Sullivan has argued that beneath the differences separating the various schools of thought within the spectrum of the French traditionalist Right, the common underlying ideal offered in opposition to the divided, lifeless, materialist character of modern society may be defined as "the creation of spiritual unity - a broad consensus, that is, upon fundamental values. Without spiritual unity, political order, social justice and a vigorous cultural life are impossible".⁴ This description

1. See "Le Socialisme parlementaire", (Sept. 1913), *ibid.*, p.73.

2. *id.*

3. *id.*

4. Noël O'Sullivan, Conservatism, London, J.M.Dent, 1976, p.34.

is particularly appropriate to Claudel's viewpoint during the pre-1914 period.

As we have seen, Claudel believed that the root cause of the malaise which he saw in French society was the abandonment of Christian beliefs and the moral values which stemmed from them. The corollary of this conviction was his ideal of true community arising from a shared recognition of the mutual obligation dictated by the Christian precept of loving one's neighbour. The manner in which he formulated his conception of this bond was to parallel certain aspects of the metaphysical theory which he had outlined in the Art poétique, where he had offered a finalistic conception of the universe as a creative entity existing for the purpose of glorifying its Creator. Strongly influenced by the spirit, though seldom by the letter and still less by the clarity of Aquinas's Summa Theologica, Claudel had described the universe, not as a confused chaos of atoms, nor, of course, as a machine governed by iron mechanical laws, but as a living whole within which, he emphasised, all things were linked "dans un rapport infini avec toutes les autres".¹

Yet he was also anxious to contend that this overall unity was in fact based on the uniqueness of every part. On the one hand, all things (Claudel constantly refers to "les choses" without defining

1. Po., p.143. For an interpretation of Claudel's ideas emphasising the influence of Aquinas, see Ernest Friche, Études claudéliennes, Porrentruy, Portes de France, 1943, pp.151-233. For a discussion of central themes in the Art poétique emphasising the extreme eclecticism of philosophical approaches on which he draws, see Maurice de Gandillac, "'Scission' et 'co-naissance' d'après 'l'Art poétique' de Claudel", in Entretiens sur Paul Claudel, (Décades du Centre Culturel International de Cerisy-la-Salle, 20-30 July 1963), Paris, Mouton, 1968, pp.115-133.

clearly what he means by the term) are viewed as being different from each other, finite (God alone being infinite) and incomplete in themselves.¹ According to Claudel's nebulous argument, each thing lacks and therefore needs all that it is not, but forms particular combinations with other things on the basis of a "différence-mère, essentielle et génératrice" arising from its individual part in the ever-changing harmony of the overall pattern.² Thus, what is, in effect, a notion of cosmic supply and demand founds universal unity on mutual need and complementary differences, while each thing plays its role in an unfolding creative design where "il ne s'agit pas d'une rangée d'automates isolés produisant le même geste infiniment, mais d'une action commune, d'une commedia dell'arte".³ On the other hand, man naturally has a special place in this scheme as God's intermediary, "le délégué aux relations extérieures, le représentant et le fondé de pouvoirs".⁴ While manifesting in their most complex form the forces and processes which define the universe as a whole, mankind's gift of free will and an immortal soul confers the duty of being a conscious witness and actor at the centre of the cosmic drama - each individual being called to recognise and fulfil the particular part of the universal design for which God had designated him.⁵

Applying similar conceptions to the moral realm in his "Propositions sur la Justice", Claudel was able to offer a position

1. See Po., pp.131, 157.

2. ibid., p.131.

3. ibid., p.144.

4. ibid., p.184.

5. See ibid., pp.142, 190-191.

which was implicitly anti-individualistic, anti-materialistic and also contrary to any view which reduced the individual to an anonymous or interchangeable function of the social machine. The moral basis for society was the fact that all men were creatures of the one God and shared a common duty to love their Creator through loving each other. At the same time, society could be described as a living entity "un ensemble d'organes complémentaires, un corps, une église", bound together by the mutual need of all its members.¹ But in Claudel's mind the idea of organic unity was evidently not intended to minimise the unique value of the individual person. Rather, it was for the individual to rationally recognise and freely accept that he could only fulfil himself in response to the needs of others. Thus, he argued:

La mesure de ma justice à l'égard des autres hommes ne sera donc pas celle de mon obligation, mais celle de mes forces. En effet si Dieu est la fin unique, je ne puis m'aimer que par rapport à Lui; aimer mon prochain comme moi-même, c'est donc aussi l'aimer par rapport à Lui. J'ai ainsi un intérêt dans toutes les créatures raisonnables. Qu'il s'agisse de moi ou de mon prochain, le but est le même, mea res agitur: ici comme là il s'agit de forces que j'ai à utiliser, d'une réponse dont je suis responsable, d'un concert que j'ai à déterminer en fournissant la note juste. Je ne suis pas complet sans la gamme de tous mes accords à qui je suis relié par une parenté innée et préétablie.²

So, for Claudel, the path to true society lay in a spirit of giving, not in the relentless pursuit of codified legal rights or the Proudhonian quest for contractual balance. As he told Louis

1. OC XV, p.164.

2. id. The idea is anticipated in La Ville II, (Th.I, pp.462-463, 488).

Massignon, it meant serving others in an equitable Christian way, according to one's particular vocation - the rich man providing money, the "savant" giving his knowledge, the monarch dispensing justice, and so on throughout the whole community.¹ It also meant the sanctification of social life. He wrote to Arthur Fontaine that he wanted to exalt "cette idée de la beauté de la foi, de la confiance personnelle d'homme à homme, de la Grâce véritable et gratuite" against the lifeless ideals of the Revolution.² And when writing to Sylvain Pitt he maintained that if society were understood in the proper spirit - as he believed it had been to some degree before the revolutionary era - then even the mundane act of buying a loaf of bread from a baker would be "aussi grave, aussi solennel, aussi sacré que celui de deux prêtres qui, après la communion, s'embrassent en se mettant les deux mains sur les épaules".³ Moreover, in the "Propositions" themselves Claudel also stressed the idea of practical charity: for the Christian, real justice meant not only loving one's fellow-men in general, but also, above all, in the concrete sense of caring for "le plus prochain" whom circumstances may place close to us, as in the example of the Good Samaritan.⁴

In principle, therefore, Claudel appears to have believed that if everyone could be brought to the Catholic faith, to a recognition

1. Letter to Massignon, 5 May 1912, Corres. PC-LM, p.164.

2. Letter to Fontaine, 30 May 1910, OC XV, p.232.

3. Letter to Pitt, 4 July 1910, *ibid.*, p.168.

4. OC XV, p.164.

of their interdependence and to an awareness of their individual vocations within the social body as a whole, there would no longer be any fundamental social discord. However, Claudel was aware that he himself was not very good at living up to his "théories édifiantes",¹ and there is no reason to suppose that he imagined them being the pattern for French society as a whole in the foreseeable future. What then, did he have to offer in terms of practical remedies for the pressing, concrete problems of the moment? When he came to touch on the subject in his articles for the Journal de Clichy his views were vague in the extreme, but in so far as he advocated or implied any specific measures, they were naturally the counterpart of his denunciations of the politicians, the power of the State and the repressive legislation against any form of association which protected the rights of the community. Writing to the abbé Fontaine in January 1913 he remarked that he wanted to see the Journal fighting for a positive rather than a purely negative programme. The positive aims were defined as follows:

Pour Dieu, pour la morale, pour une école capable d'enseigner l'énergie et la discipline, indispensables à la classe ouvrière plus qu'à toute autre;

Pour la protection avant tout des familles, des femmes et des enfants; (les vieillards sont beaucoup moins intéressants);

Pour les associations de toute nature.²

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1. See letter to Massignon, 6 Feb. 1912, Corres. PC-LM, p.155: "J'ai parfois honte de ce ton dévotieux que je prends dans ma correspondance et qui n'est guère qu'hypocrisie. Si vous m'aviez vu l'autre jour expulser impitoyablement par une neige terrible deux de ces mendiants qui 'infestent' le consulat, vous m'auriez fait souvenir de mes théories édifiantes sur le proximus. En réalité la charité envers le prochain n'a jamais été mon fort, comme tout ce qui exige un peu de peine. Mais mettez-moi une plume à la main!"
 2. Letter to Daniel Fontaine, 13 Jan. 1913, Chroniques, p.103.

In the event, Claudel showed more taste for castigating his enemies than for demonstrating the positive aspects of his thinking. He did, however, have a few words to say on the need for protection of the family, and for development of workers' associations. The family, it should be remembered, had been vigorously defended by many traditionalist writers from the early nineteenth century onwards as a moral bastion against the individualism reigning in the wake of the Revolution. Indeed, it was common for such writers to stress that the basic unit in society was not the individual but the family. For example, in Ce qu'est la monarchie, Dom Besse argued that "la Famille est au corps social ce que la cellule est au corps vivant, son premier élément constitutif".¹ This too was Claudel's view.

Since the time of his own marriage in 1906, he had more than once stated his belief that wedlock should be considered as a form of indissoluble order or enclosure, in a sense equivalent to the order and enclosure of monastic life. He had, for instance, sought to persuade Louis Massignon that he should either marry or enter a monastery in order to provide himself with a necessary "enceinte extérieure",² and when referring to Massignon in a letter to the abbé Fontaine he had again stressed the notion of moral discipline in marriage: "Cet état de liberté est extrêmement dangereux, je le sais,

1. Paris, Jouve, 1906, p.6. See also Griffiths, op. cit., pp.265-266 for discussion of the same theme in the work of other Catholic writers.
2. Letter to Massignon, 24 Dec. 1909, Corres. PC-LM, p.77. See also, letters to Massignon, 19 Nov. 1908 and 2 March 1912, *ibid.*, pp.54, 159.

l'ayant traversé. Il faut absolument l'ordre, quel qu'il soit, la soumission à une autorité et à une tâche",¹ It therefore comes as no surprise that in the Journal itself he should have claimed that "dans toute société bien réglée, la véritable unité, ce n'est pas l'individu, c'est la famille", because - he no doubt assumed - the family, "cette petite nation", represented a natural moral and social training-ground that was essential to the stable society.² Indeed, according to Claudel, the very fact of undertaking to have a large family was a gesture of confidence in society in the same way as Malthusianism was symptomatic of a lack of faith.³

He was prepared to admit that the recently passed law granting an allowance to poor families with more than three children had been "un premier pas dans la voie de la justice",⁴ but from his sweeping criticisms of other defects in existing legislation it is evident that he wanted to see the unit strengthened by the abolition of divorce; changes in the law on division of inheritances and on death duties; and tax concessions to fathers of large families: again, these demands were characteristic of those made by the social thinkers of the Catholic Right.⁵ Equally, Claudel added a proposal that the conditions of suffrage should be changed so that every father would be given "un nombre de voix proportionné aux parts d'intérêt qu'il a prises dans la

1. Letter to Daniel Fontaine, 13 Jan. 1913, Chroniques, p.102.

2. "Les Familles nombreuses", *ibid.*, p.69.

3. *ibid.*, p.68.

4. *id.*

5. See Charles Baussan, De Frédéric Le Play à Paul Bourget, Paris, Flammarion, 1935, *passim*.

société".¹ In effect this would have enshrined the family as a political as well as a social unit, and was obviously based on the assumption that power would thus devolve to the more conservative, morally responsible (moral responsibility being equated with Catholicism) members of the community.

Claudé's articles for the Journal give a rather less clear impression of his position on the question of professional association. He had shown an interest in the question some five years previously, when he had noted in his diary for August 1908 that monarchism, federalism and syndicalism were three forces which could work together to restore the real organic unity of France, as opposed to the false unity created by the Revolution. However, it is apparent that, when talking of syndicalism in this context, he was not thinking of the modern syndicat, but of the old, hierarchical corps de métier, dear to anti-revolutionary ideology. Thus, he wrote later in the same set of comments:

Le point encore obscur est l'organisation des corporations: l'ouvrier actuel est socialement une image de l'électeur politique, indifférent, interchangeable, et là on ne peut dire que ce soit la conséquence d'une erreur théorique. L'intéresser? La collectivité est également incapable de conseil et de direction. Au-dessus de l'entreprise privée, le rattacher à son corps de métier. Il faut que celui-ci ait des obligations et des responsabilités et non pas seulement des exigences. Il faut qu'il y ait une autre volonté au-dessus.²

1. "Les Familles nombreuses", Chroniques, p.70.

2. Jo.I, p.68.

Since Claudel did not elaborate on these cryptic remarks, it is impossible to judge what practical measures, if any, he may have had in mind at the time. But it is clear that he believed the corporation could be used as a means of mitigating the psychological alienation of modern industrial labour, and somehow involving the workers more closely in the system. When he came to discuss the subject in the Journal it was apparent that he still had the same intention in mind. Although he now talked exclusively of syndicats rather than corporations, and seemed to accept that they should be run by the workers themselves, he nevertheless expected them to be ultra-moderate and the very opposite of class-conscious: hence this paternalistic advice to his readers:

C'est cependant uniquement dans le Syndicat bien compris, honnêtement et intelligemment dirigé, débarrassé des politiciens et des fous furieux, que la classe ouvrière peut trouver l'organe de défense et de progrès dont elle a besoin. On n'est bien servi que par soi-même. L'ouvrier doit renoncer à toute espérance d'améliorer son sort, s'il ne fait usage de sa liberté que pour s'emporter en injures contre celui-ci ou celui-là, pour lire L'Humanité et La Guerre sociale et pour élire tous les quatre ans, des politiciens du genre de Willm.¹

According to Claudel's extremely conservative view, the syndicat should serve primarily as an educational body. The workers should learn habits of thrift, temperance and, above all, "une forte formation morale qu'ils ne peuvent trouver que dans la religion", to give them a sense of discipline and dignity which would allow them to raise themselves "en dépit des sens adverses".² Thus, he evidently

1. "Parlementarisme", Chroniques, p.67.

2. id.

conceived the trade union as a means of drawing the men away from the influence of the marchands de vin, the cafés-concerts and the cinema, which he believed to be draining the pockets and sapping the moral fibre of the working classes.¹

Claudé also envisaged the syndicat offering another form of education, intended, in this case, as a partial remedy for the stultifying and dehumanising effects of labour conditions in modern industry. The distaste which he had shown for any over-mechanical approach in the realms of philosophy or social relations was matched by his feeling that one of the root causes of working-class alienation was the trammelling of the industrial labourer to the machine. As he put it in the Journal, his ideal for the worker was that "à la manière d'un artiste, il trouve à la fois dans son travail plaisir et liberté", and he could not but feel a measure of horror at the thought of a human being "réduit à la régularité inconsciente d'une machine".²

At this stage in his life, Claudé did not appear to have any idea for mitigating the concrete problem itself, but he believed that its psychological effects might be tempered if the syndicat could offer some form of general technical and economic education. This would help to give the workers the understanding of the industrial

1. See letter to Daniel Fontaine, 13 Jan. 1913, *ibid.*, p.103; also, letter to Fontaine, 20 Feb. 1913, *ibid.*, p.113: "Je suis consterné de voir que vous avez un cafetier parmi vos directeurs! Ces gens-là sont partout. Pas moyen de jamais se lancer à fond contre eux!"
2. "Le Chronométrage", (8 March 1913), *ibid.*, p.51. This idea is prefigured in La Ville II, Th.I, p.452, where the anarchist, Avare, describes the impersonal, mechanical character of modern labour (which has replaced the creative, artisanal production of the past) as the reason for the unrest of the workers in the City.

world to which they belonged and, he presumably imagined, a greater sense of involvement in the existing capitalistic industrial system:

Les ouvriers ont souvent l'esprit rétréci par la division du travail, il faut qu'ils apprennent à comprendre ce qu'ils font, à connaître le vaste organe économique dont ils sont une partie, à faire un autre usage de leur intelligence et de leurs loisirs que pour lire l'immorale littérature radicale et socialiste. Combien peu d'ouvriers savent la différence d'une action et d'une obligation? Combien ont une idée même sommaire de la manière dont s'établit le budget d'une grande entreprise? Combien de la concurrence que la branche qui les intéresse trouve dans les pays étrangers? C'est cette instruction pratique, professionnelle et réellement affranchissante que la République se garde bien de leur donner. Il vaut mieux les nourrir de fables extravagantes sur les crimes des rois et des prêtres.¹

In all of this there was no mention of improvements in pay or working conditions, nor was the subject raised in any of his other writings during the pre-1914 period. Of course, it may have been something which he took for granted, and it would, after all, have been a logical extension of his ideal of caring for "le plus prochain". Whatever the case, it did not prevent him in one of his articles from contrasting the socialists' "rêves imbéciles de paradis terrestre" with the Church's teaching that "le bonheur n'est pas de ce monde" and that poverty was a privileged condition which should be borne courageously and patiently - as Christ had done - while awaiting a just reward in the after-life.² On the other hand, he did appear to favour the idea of political representation for the syndicats, presumably within some form of wider corporatist framework, for in one

1. "Parlementarisme", Chroniques, p.67.

2. "Le Socialisme parlementaire", ibid., p.73.

of his articles, alongside his remark on the need for multiple votes for heads of families, he also stated his intention (which he did not fulfil) of writing at a later date on "la représentation des professions".¹

In short, Claudel's views on the Social Question during this period do not form a particularly clear picture. He knew what he detested - the desertion of Catholic beliefs and moral values; the encroaching power of the State; the politicians' use of the Church-State question as a distraction from the problem of social reform; the spread of class-conscious socialist and revolutionary syndicalist ideas among the urban proletariat. He had his own reformulation of the traditional Christian principle of loving one's neighbour, and he could dream of a united Catholic society. He was attracted by the idea of association which embodied the idea of personal contact and moral community. But in practical terms there was no suggestion that he had thought out his ideas on the subject in any depth: they were not much more than crude echoes of the slogans (rather than the theories) of the extreme Right. However, there was little reason for him to do otherwise. Apart from the fact that these issues were not his sole concern in life, there was scant cause for him to believe that the climate of the times favoured fundamental change in the direction which he would have wished to see. Nothing is more revealing in this respect than his words in the summer of 1913 when he welcomed the findings of Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde, who had sought to prove, in Les Jeunes Gens d'aujourd'hui that the rising

1. "Les Familles nombreuses", Chroniques, p.70.

generation of students and young intellectuals were returning to traditional religious and social values.¹ He maintained that their conclusions seemed to be supported by a conversation which he himself had had with two young teachers. But he also remarked that it was hard for him to accustom himself to this possibility, since he belonged to a generation of Catholics who were so used to reacting against a hostile society that "le triomphe de leurs idées les laisserait déconcertés, et qui sait même? un peu mélancoliques".² These words also need to be borne in mind as we consider his attitude towards the Action Française group.

E. Political Authority: the Problem of Ends and Means

It would be somewhat misleading to categorise Claudel as a monarchist during the pre-1914 period, for that would imply a level of commitment which was absent in his case. His was not the fervent, hereditary devotion of the royalist aristocrat, nor did he share the preoccupation of Maurras and his group with the need to found a coherent monarchist ideology. Nevertheless, like many Catholic traditionalists of the day, he would, ideally, have wished to see the re-establishment of a monarchy which would provide a unifying authority over the French nation in place of the sterile parliamentary feuds and governmental instability of the discordant, secular Republic.

1. See 'Agathon', Les Jeunes Gens d'aujourd'hui, Paris, Plon, 1913. This highly selective enquête/propaganda work was a follow-up to L'Esprit de la Nouvelle Sorbonne, Paris, Mercure de France, 1911.

2. "La Nouvelle Jeunesse", (9 Aug. 1913), Chroniques, p.70.

It should, perhaps, be said here that on occasions when he was in a particularly savage frame of mind Claudel could show traces of the most brutal elitism. Mention has already been made of his remarks to Frizeau in 1908 dismissing socialism on the grounds that civilisation was based on struggle in which the strongest deserved to dominate.¹ It was this same underlying contempt for the masses which made him remark to André Suarès in August 1908 that Czarist repression in Russia was justified even if the people did have legitimate grievances. Thus, he demanded: "Mais comment résigner son pouvoir entre les mains de ces épouvantables brutes que je connais moi-même de vue et dont Gorki est lui-même l'image? Là naît le véritable crime. J'aime encore mieux le despotisme que l'anarchie, le chaos".² Or again, there were the comments in his diary for January 1911, at the end of a list of criticisms of the Revolution: "On peut mériter d'un homme, d'un supérieur. La foule ne peut qu'être entraînée ou corrompue. Les élections sont l'abdication rabâchée tous les quatre ans par un peuple gâteux".³ And immediately below, he had added: "La première vertu d'un roi est le courage de verser le sang. L'expérience de la vie rend indulgent à l'égard des 'tyrans'".⁴

After an unpleasant journey on a crowded boat in May 1911 he could even speculate that true civilisation might require "une répression impitoyable des classes inférieures", such as his loathing

1. See above, p.48.

2. Letter to Suarès, 31 August 1908, Corres. PC-AS, p.132.

3. Jo.I, p.183. See also Claudel's comments on the elections of 1914, in ibid., p.286 (May 1914), and letter to Jammes, 14 May 1914, Corres. PC-FJ/GF, p.268.

4. Jo.I, p.183.

of the mob and his "horreur de leur déchaînement".¹ However, this type of emotional outburst represented a side of his personality of which he himself was wary,² and it did not, of course, indicate that he was a convinced advocate of despotism. On the contrary, his ideals of charity and moral unity were also paralleled by the ideal of the benign Catholic monarch who would heal the wounds of France with a firm but gentle authority.

Claudé's diary for August 1908 contains a newspaper cutting which reprinted the text of a long interview given in 1871 by the Comte de Chambord, who had at that time been the legitimist pretender to the throne. These "admirables paroles", as Claudé called them, amounted to a brief summary of post-revolutionary royalist doctrine.³ The Count explained that he had not accepted, and would never accept the possibility of a Restoration which repeated the error made by Louis XVIII in attempting to reconcile the throne with revolutionary institutions. He remarked that if he ever took the throne, he would rescind the Code Napoléon "en tout ce qu'il renferme de contraire à l'Eglise", especially the laws dealing with marriage and inheritance. Equally, he would abolish parliamentary democracy, end administrative centralisation, and destroy the University.⁴

1. Jo.I, p.196, (May 1914). Compare with the words of Tête d'Or as he cowed the crowd into submission after he has murdered the Emperor: "Arrière!/Qui de vous osera me braver et me regarder face à face misérables!/O chiens!/ ... /O que comme un dieu, je pusse lever deux bras chargés de tonnerres/Pour écraser cette basse chiennaille!" (Th.I, pp.100-101).
2. See, for example, Jo.I, p.240, (Nov.1912), where Claudé refers to "ma dureté de coeur envers le prochain, et cet esprit détestable de querelle et d'animosité".
3. Jo.I, p.64. The original source of the cutting itself is uncertain.
4. In *ibid.*, p.65.

Under the firm, unifying authority of the monarch, provincial liberties would be restored, and the people given a voice in local administration (through town and provincial councils of notables, themselves sending delegates to national councils) where they were competent to express an opinion. But national political decisions must be placed primarily in the hands of the king, supported by properly qualified individuals, who would be chosen on their merits, since Chambord accepted that there could be no return to the class system of the ancien régime. In conclusion he had stated that the anarchy of party politics and the absence of any real authority would of themselves destroy the heritage of the Revolution: then the time would be ripe for the monarchy to save France from disintegration.¹

Claudé had entirely approved of this declaration, and had been particularly impressed by the idea of a return to a quasi-federal administrative structure, "beaucoup plus souple et plus moderne que l'unité révolutionnaire".² At that moment he had seemed willing to believe that a re-establishment of the monarchy was a serious possibility for the future. The post-revolutionary period could merely be a transitory historical crisis which would ultimately be seen to have had a beneficial effect by leading the monarchy to shape itself to the needs of modern society:

La monarchie française a déjà passé par des crises d'adaptation aussi graves que celle-ci. La guerre de Cent ans. Faiblesse des premiers Capétiens comparée à Clovis ou Charlemagne.

1. See *ibid.*, pp.66-67.

2. *id.*

Une théorie bien constituée est comme un homme vivant qui est appelé à se faire sa place. Au bout d'un siècle la théorie monarchique commence à être vivante et organique. M. ne l'a pas faite, mais il l'a comprise.¹

As François Varillon and Jacques Petit suggest in their notes to Claudel's diary, the 'M.' in question here was probably Maurras.² There is evidence to indicate that during these years Claudel approved of the latter's attachment to monarchism, but disagreed with important aspects of his ideology. At one point, around the time when the Church-State controversy had been nearing its climax, it seems likely that Claudel had, in fact, been drawn towards the neo-monarchist group, for a letter written to him by Francis Jammes in May 1911 on the subject of the Action Française contains the comment: "Vous et moi qui avions tant d'idées communes déjà en 1905, je sentais que vous vous trompiez quand vous vous orientiez vers eux".³ Moreover, Claudel himself was to recall in a letter to Suarès that at the time of the Inventories he had been impressed, almost despite himself, by the force of Maurras's attacks on the Republic:

Un impie et un croyant ne luttent pas à armes égales, toutes les injures contre Dieu et la religion lui vont au coeur et lui font de profondes blessures. Dans ces conditions un homme est un homme, et j'avoue que l'âpre polémique de Maurras m'a plu, peut-être non pas par les meilleurs côtés de mon âme. Mais du moins il hait autant que moi la démocratie, il donne une voix à ce furieux sentiment de dégoût d'un coeur noble qui se sent écrasé par les bestiaux, par la force brute, par le nombre.⁴

1. id.

2. See *ibid.*, pp.1086-1087.

3. Jammes, letter to Claudel, 16 May 1911, Corres.PC-FJ/GF, p.205.

4. Letter to Suarès, 10 Feb. 1911, Corres. PC-AS, p.160.

Yet, from this letter and from other correspondence it is apparent that whatever sympathy he may have felt at that point was largely dissipated in the ensuing years. Claudel undoubtedly shared many of the same antipathies as Maurras, and similar preferences for a number of traditional social and political values or institutions. But beneath the common ground there lay fundamental differences. Notwithstanding the wide support which Maurras commanded among the Catholic Right, including many churchmen, these differences, coupled with certain contingent circumstances, rapidly led Claudel towards an outright hostility which he was to retain throughout the rest of his life.

In the first place he was repelled by Maurras's ideological dogmatism. Although Claudel had, up to a point, attempted to discipline his fertile, erratic mind within the framework of his religion, his temperament did not lend itself easily to rigid theoretical systems. Moreover, in political terms his experience tended to militate against attachment to the value of abstract theory. His consular duties had brought him into prolonged contact with the pragmatic world of politico-economic negotiations and colonial Realpolitik where flexibility was the crucial factor in achieving success. And he had recently acquired some difficult first-hand experience of local government while administering the French concession at Tientsin.¹ More than once in his writings Claudel expressed a general disdain for ideological theory as inappropriate to the realities of human existence, and this was a reproach which he levelled at Maurras in a letter to Gide on 15 January 1910:

1. See Gadoffre, op. cit., pp.127-131.

Toutes ces hautes théories politiques ressemblent à nos discours d'école sur Richelieu et Mazarin. La pratique des affaires désapprend les grandes théories, tout l'art de l'homme d'État se réduit à parer au plus pressé, et à profiter de l'occasion au travers de beaucoup de bêtises, d'erreurs et de méprises, et à faire chaque jour ce qu'on peut.¹

Besides this basic difference of perspective, there was also the fact that Claudel distrusted the particular philosophy on which Maurrassism was founded. Maurras proudly claimed to be the inheritor of Comte and the positivism of the nineteenth century. His adoption of monarchism was allegedly the result of a rational choice, based on historical analysis. As René Rémond has pointed out, it was essentially a demystification of the monarchy, an attachment to the institution, not a personal reverence for the charismatic figure of the king himself.² This approach did not inspire Claudel. The essence of his argument against Maurras, as conveyed to Suarès in February 1911, was that a living idea could not be produced from dead material. To Maurras's "sécheresse pédantesque" (including his doctrine of rigid classicism in literature), to his admiration for the execrable Comte, and to his "manière réaliste de concevoir la monarchie", Claudel opposed his own ideal of "une monarchie revêtue d'un caractère religieux et dont

1. Corres. PC-AG, p.117. See Jo.I, pp.164-165, (Aug. 1910), where Claudel refers contemptuously to "les idéologues, les polytechniciens, les sociologues, les socialistes" who seek to bring "une rigueur incongrue" into human affairs. See also, letter to Piero Jahier, 18 Feb. 1912, in Giordan, Claudel en Italie, p.93.
2. See René Rémond, La Droite en France de la Première Restauration à la Ve République, Vol. I, revised edition, Paris, Aubier, 1968, pp.181-182.

l'autorité est celle moins de la force que de la persuasion",¹
 or, as he put it in another letter, "un Roi à la manière de Salomon
 et non pas de Louis-Philippe".²

Moreover, although he was not entirely immune to its attraction, Claudel could not condone the persistent savagery of Maurras's call to revolt. His position in this respect was an extension of ideas which he had frequently expressed in his writings on religious subjects. Claudel, like many Catholic writers during this period, tended to lay emphasis on the value of willing submission to a spiritual rule, as against the lure of any false liberty which lay outside Catholicism.³ Order and unity were the products of willing acceptance of God's design, acceptance of orthodox Catholic dogma, acceptance of the authority of the Church hierarchy.⁴ Similarly, in principle, Claudel believed that the Catholic should submit to established authority in the temporal realm. In 1910, when explaining to Péguy why he had been appalled by the revisionist agitation in the Dreyfus Affair, Claudel had written: "Car si vous êtes chrétien, vous êtes ami de l'ordre, si vous aimez l'ordre vous reconnaissez l'autorité et quelle autorité

1. Letter to Suarès, 10 Feb. 1911, Corres. PC-AS, p.160. Compare with the words of Georges de Coûfontaine in L'Otage exalting the ideal of the Catholic feudal monarch (Th.II, p.247); or the qualities ascribed to the future king, Ivors, in La Ville II - balance, level-headedness, "une tendre sollicitude et une autorité irrécusable" (Th.I, p.476), awareness that happiness does not lie in earthly pleasures (*ibid.*, p.477), prudence (*ibid.*, pp.482-483), and submission to the Church (*ibid.*, pp.486-487).
2. Letter to Suarès, 27 May 1911. Corres. PC-AS, p.168.
3. For discussion of this theme in Claudel's and other literature of the Catholic Revival, see Griffiths, *op. cit.*, pp.317-347.
4. The theme recurs with particular frequency in Claudel's letters to Gide. See, for example, letters 9 March 1906, 3 March 1908, 30 July 1908, 19 March 1912, Corres.PC-AG, pp.65-66, 84, 86, 196.

y a-t-il si vous la jugez comme ayant vous-même autorité sur elle?"¹

With some justification, he argued that the Gospels taught the duty to obey one's masters, however cruel they might be.² Drawing an unexpected parallel between the condemnation of Dreyfus and that of Savonarola, he concluded that however saintly the latter might have been, and however unworthy the pope who had tried him, the verdict on the "révolté" had been just.³

In this case the argument for submission to constituted authority was being used to condemn political disruption by the Left, but to be consistent it would also negate support for right-wing agitation, and there is no doubt that Claudel was aware of the fact. With regard to Maurras, he could feel the appeal of the Action Française brand of force, understand its power, and be disturbed by its implications. At the same time, when writing to Suarès, he showed a pragmatic - and perhaps self-interested - willingness to accept that his own ideal of a benign Catholic monarchy was not really a serious possibility for the near future, so he had no intention of fighting for it when there were more important Christian duties calling him:

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1. Letter to Péguy, 10 Aug. 1910, in Antoine, art. cit., p.30.
 2. See Dino Bigongiari (ed.), The Political Ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas, New York, Hafner, 1953, pp.XXXI-XXXII, for a brief discussion of St. Peter's and St. Paul's pronouncements on the subject (and Aquinas's interpretation of the question).
 3. In Antoine, op.cit., p.30. Compare letter to Elémir Bourges, 23 June 1905, CPC I, p.176: "Vous vous doutez, cher Bourges, du dissentiment qui me sépare de votre Déchaîné. Je suis pour l'autorité légitime, avec tous les Jupiter contre tous les Prométhée. J'espère que la seconde partie de votre apocalypse reclouera sur son rocher le détestable pandoride."

Pour l'instant cette monarchie est un rêve et un homme de pensée a d'autres devoirs que de se mêler à la cohue des carrefours. Mon seul roi est le Christ, c'est pour Lui que je lutte. Les violences peuvent plaire un moment à ce qu'il y a de moins bon en moi. L'instant d'après j'en rougis. Parmi ces gens qui nous font tant de mal, beaucoup sont de braves gens et de bonne foi. Et le mot de l'Apôtre est toujours vrai. Ce n'est pas par le mal qu'on fait du bien. Sed vincere in bono malum.¹

These barriers between Claudel and the Action Française group combined with more personal reasons for his distrust. In 1911 the Maurrassian intellectuals were campaigning vigorously for a return to classicism in literature, and in this context Claudel found himself the object of a scathing attack by Pierre Lasserre on 30 April of that year.² After receiving letters of protest from a number of his readers Lasserre subsequently produced a rather more flattering article on 7 May, but he still referred to Tête d'Or, for instance, as "ce pandémonium de littérature barbare".³ Claudel appeared to take Lasserre's attack in good part, even describing it on one occasion as "une critique loyale et sincère".⁴ Nevertheless, it can scarcely have increased his regard for the Maurrassians.

Furthermore, he regarded the Action Française as a threat to his efforts to convert André Gide. It was particularly important to him that nothing should damage the reputation of the Church in the

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1. Letter to Suarès, 10 Feb. 1911, p.160. Compare with the neutral, fatalistic, submissive views attributed to the Pope in L'Otage throughout Act I, scene 2 (Th.II, pp.237-251); or the position adopted by Coeuvre before the revolution in La Ville II (Th.I, p.464), though he hails the destruction of the City after it has taken place (see *ibid.*, p.486).
 2. Pierre Lasserre, "Un livre allemand, une lettre de M. Giraud," L'Action française, 30 April 1911.
 3. Pierre Lasserre, "Paul Claudel", L'Action française, 7 May 1911.
 4. Letter to Jammes, 19 May 1911, Corres. PC-FJ/GF, p.206.

eyes of his friend. Meanwhile, Maurras, an atheist with no interest in the spiritual basis of Catholicism, vociferously defended the Church as a model of social authority, and used the religious question as a political battering-ram for his own ends, thereby associating it in people's minds with the more extreme aspects of his ideology. Early in 1910, Claudel had already had a warning of the danger when he read an article in which Gide had shown signs of resenting Maurras's hard-headed attitude towards matters of religion,¹ but the issue was raised even more pointedly in January 1912 when Gide's NRF became involved in a heated exchange with Georges Sorel's L'Indépendance which had by then adopted an increasingly monarchist colouring and even posed as a defender of the Church. Claudel thus found himself in a somewhat delicate position, since he was a contributor to both of these periodicals.

The particular issues at stake in the polemics are not relevant here, but while the debate was continuing, Gide had written to Claudel expressing his contempt for those who mixed Catholicism with politics and used religion as "un casse-tête" to crush their enemies.² He had also remarked: "~~Me~~ rapprocher du Christ, c'est m'éloigner d'eux".³ In Claudel's reply it was evident that he assimilated Sorel's group to the Maurrassians and, while he sought in general terms to explain the anger of Catholics in the face of persecution,

1. See Robert Mallet's summary of Gide's article (which had appeared in the NRF, Jan. 1910) in Corres. PC-AG, pp.297-298; and Claudel's letter to Gide, 15 Jan. 1910, *ibid.*, pp.116-118.

2. Gide, letter to Claudel, 7 Jan. 1912, *ibid.*, p.189.

3. *id.*

he was at pains to stress that "tous ces violents, les gens de L'Action française et les autres, ne sont catholiques que de nom, ne croient, ne pratiquent pas et n'observent pas les commandements".¹

This was something which obviously remained fixed in his mind, for Gide was to record in his diary, following a meeting with Claudel ten months later, that the latter had indulged in a long diatribe against the "catholiques politiques" of Action Française.² By that time, of course, Claudel had begun to write his own aggressive articles for the Journal de Clichy. If he had been challenged on the subject, he would presumably have argued the distinction between the Church being forced to use politics as a weapon in its defence, and politics using the Church as a weapon for its own ends. Even so, his position was scarcely consistent with the submissive attitude which he had vaunted to Péguy. Yet, the fact remains that he was already aware of something which many Catholics did not recognise at that time; namely, the incompatibility of Maurrassism with some of the most basic tenets of Catholic belief. In practical terms, he was thus condemned to an essentially negative political position. He distrusted the one meaningful group which was pledged to re-establish a monarchy in France, and he clearly did not believe in the possibility, or even the desirability of a coup de force

1. Letter to Gide, 9 Jan. 1912, *ibid.*, p.190. See also, letter to Gide, 15 Jan. 1912, *ibid.*, p.192, where Claudel remarks that he has no liking for "ceux qui ne veulent voir dans la religion qu'une autorité et une discipline, et qui voudraient garder le Christianisme sans le Christ".

2. Gide, Journal, I, pp.384-385, (19 Nov. 1912).

to overthrow the Republic. This left him only with the options of fatalistic acquiescence, sterile protest, or, as was the case in his articles for the Journal, demands for piecemeal electoral reforms which were almost as unrealistic in the political climate of the day as was the dream of a Catholic monarchy itself.

CHAPTER II. The Enlightened Imperialist.

A. Opening Remarks.

Claudé did not leave anything resembling a chronicle of his reactions to all of the major international questions which occupied public attention during the pre-war years. However, he did leave evidence of his views on two particular issues with which he was brought into contact, directly or indirectly, by the course of his consular career. On the one hand, his long years of service in China placed him in a remarkably good position to have developed informed opinions on the nature of Western imperialist activity there. On the other hand, he was to be serving in Germany during the last three years before the outbreak of war, and was therefore to be particularly conscious of the threat which German military strength posed to France. The present chapter will be entirely devoted to the first of these issues, since the second can be more appropriately placed in the next chapter as a preface to his writings during the war itself.

His views on imperialism in China were perhaps more complex, and in some ways more paradoxical, than on any other political issue which he encountered in the course of his life. Several sets of broad, overlapping questions were involved. What was his attitude to the native civilisation of China? How did he assess the methods, the values and the institutions which were being projected by France and the other imperialist Powers into the regions which fell within their

spheres of influence? How did he judge the rivalry between the imperialist Powers? And, in more general terms, did he regard imperialism as a morally justified, historically desirable process?

The principal source of evidence for this period is to be found in the various drafts of Sous le signe du dragon, a book which was completed in 1911 after some six years gestation, but was left unpublished until more than thirty years later. Gilbert Gadoffre has made a fairly detailed survey of this work in his Claudél et l'univers chinois. However, it will need to be considered here in considerable depth, both because of its importance, and because Professor Gadoffre's interpretation of Claudél's position needs to be modified.

It should be stated at the outset that the nature of the evidence itself raises a number of difficulties relating to authorial responsibility, and to the evolution which occurred during the gestation of the work. The first known draft - the most important - is a typescript dating from the time of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, and couched, for the most part, in telegraphic style or note form.¹ It appears to have been written with some form of

1. The typescript is in ASPC, File PVIIA, "Contacts et circonstances. Sous le signe du dragon." It consists of seven individually paginated fascicules, each containing one or more chapters or sets of notes: references will be given in the form, "fasc.I, p.7". Gadoffre's dating of the draft is somewhat misleading here. He suggests that the text was probably written over the period 1904-1909 (op.cit., p.144). It may, in fact, have been started in 1904 but was almost certainly completed in 1905, though the marginal notes for projected modifications or amplifications (which Gadoffre does not mention) were probably not added until three or four years later (see below, my p.83, note 1). The dating of the original draft is suggested by the following factors: (a) remarks in fasc.II (pp.13,25) assuming the continued existence of the Chinese mandarin examination system, whereas this was abolished in Sept. 1905; (b) references to books or other documents cited do not go beyond 1904, but there is a reference

collaboration from Philippe Berthelot, since the preface refers to "les auteurs",¹ and although a much revised version was eventually to be published under Claudel's name alone, the preface to the printed edition mentions Berthelot as "le confident et l'inspirateur de ce petit ouvrage".² In the first draft the stated intention of the authors is to offer a broad survey of Chinese affairs for the information of statesmen, journalists and others who might be called upon to exercise "une action quelconque" in the Far East.³ However, the contents go beyond this intention: they include a great deal of scathing criticism of the policies of the imperialist Powers, while at the same time offering a programme of positive action for the mutual benefit of the Powers and the native population.

The project then seems to have been placed in abeyance for some time. Claudel made corrections to the original draft some three or four years after it had been written, and penned in a large number

to "la restitution récente de 100 millions en 1905 par les Américains à la Chine", (fasc.V, p.24) and to a Russian diplomat, "ministre à Pékin depuis mai 1905" (fasc.V, p.20); (c) there are several references indicating that the Russo-Japanese War (Feb. 1904-Sept. 1905) was in progress, and in some cases anticipating the consequences of likely Japanese victory: see fasc.I, p.24 (referring to the certainty of Japanese success); fasc.III, p.26 (consideration of roles played by the Powers in China leaves the sections on Japan and Russia blank); fasc.IV, p.7 (trade threatened by the war); fasc.VI, pp.2, 4-5 (refers to the fact that the Japanese hold Port Arthur - captured in Dec. 1904); fasc.VII, p.11, (refers to "la conclusion désormais imminente de la paix"). My impression is that most of the draft was written during the late summer of 1905 while Claudel was on leave in France.

1. fasc.VII, p.1.

2. See OC IV, p. 11 (preface dated 20 June 1947).

3. fasc.VII, p.1.

of marginal notes with a view to updating the typescript.¹ These comments make it clear that although he saw a need to change some arguments in the light of subsequent events since the time when the book had been conceived, he still held to the programme of policies advocated in the original: for example, at the end of the chapter of general conclusions, he remarked: "Tout ceci reste vrai".²

In 1910 Claudel also started to write another, more discursive draft.³ As far as it went it was close to the final version, but it was left incomplete. Later that same year, he began a further draft, virtually identical to the version eventually published.⁴ As Gilbert Gadoffre observes, there is some evidence to suggest that Berthelot was still following the project at this stage, for there is a pencilled note

1. I can as yet give only a tentative estimation of the dating of these notes, since most of them simply suggest an unspecified lapse of time since the writing of the original, being of the type, "Parler aujourd'hui de .."; "Reste très vrai ..."; "A modifier aujourd'hui ..", or referring to developments in very general terms - for instance, concerning the eclipse which he had foreseen for Russia as a result of the war with Japan: "Ce n'est déjà plus vrai." (fasc.I, p.26). However, assuming that the notes were all added around the same time, crucial remarks would seem to be: "Voir l'histoire de ces 4 dernières années" (fasc.VI, p.15); or a note at the end of the same fascicule observing that the basic ideas remained valid, but the arguments were to be seriously modified "en s'inspirant des événements de ces 3 dernières années". Claudel also remarks (in fasc.II, p.30): "A T'tsin tous les mandarins parlaient anglais". The use of the past tense might suggest that the notes dated from after the ending of his period in Tientsin, which he had completed in the summer of 1909.
2. fasc.I, p.31. Other examples relating to specific points are quoted in context later in this chapter.
3. The dating may be deduced from the fact that (a) in Chapter VI, pp.3, 4, 12, Claudel gives sets of trade figures which include the year 1909; (b) the third draft was written entirely, or for the most part, in 1910 (see below, note 4).
4. The dating is given by the fact that on p.141 of the draft, Claudel writes "aujourd'hui (1910)", and the trade figures are left as in the second draft. Gadoffre is incorrect when he states (in op. cit., p.167) that this draft lacks the chapter on Chinese religions: the chapter covers pp.60-92 of the manuscript.

on the back of page 59 of the manuscript: "Je crois qu'il est préférable que nous signions d'un pseudonyme. Que pensez-vous de 'Le Bouton de corail'."¹ Possibly Claudel was expecting Berthelot to contribute chapters to this version. All we know for certain is that the actual writing of the draft was completed by Claudel himself. Finally, there was another typescript (probably dating from 1911) of which only the chapter on Chinese religions and one or two other pages have survived,² while the book itself was left unpublished until 1948 when it was produced in the guise of a historical curio.

These details are important, because by the time it reached its more or less final form in 1910 the book had changed considerably in relation to the original draft. Whereas the sections dealing with Chinese civilisation had been written up very fully, those dealing with imperialism in China had been considerably narrowed in scope. The latter no longer offered a committed analysis: several of the projected chapters had disappeared almost without trace: most of the criticisms were veiled or omitted altogether: almost all of the arguments for positive change had been removed, leaving the study as an emasculated, inconclusive survey.

In the absence of external evidence directly relating to the original conception and subsequent transformation of the book, the

1. See Gadoffre, *op.cit.*, p.146.

2. These fragments are not mentioned by Gadoffre. The first page of the typescript is corrected in the handwriting of Claudel's old age, and on the second sheet he wrote "la page 2 manque" which would seem to suggest that the typescript dated from the period when Claudel had originally been involved in writing the book, but that large parts of it had subsequently been lost. Since the published version is virtually identical to the third draft, the question is immaterial for the purposes of the present discussion.

reasons for this self-censorship remain a matter for speculation. As will be seen later, one contributory factor may well have been sheer discouragement at the course which events were taking in China. Possibly, Claudel also felt increasingly out of touch with developments in the Far East after he returned to Europe in the summer of 1909. Possibly, he feared that if the book was published, even pseudonymously, in the form originally envisaged, it might be traced back to him and further jeopardise his career (which had so recently been threatened by the investigation into his alleged pro-clerical machinations at Tientsin). Possibly, there were other entirely different reasons. It is also unclear how far Berthelot contributed directly or indirectly to the first draft and continued to consult with Claudel thereafter.¹ Be that as it may, the first draft is obviously the most revealing from the political viewpoint and, notwithstanding the elements of uncertainty surrounding the project, it can be taken as an accurate

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1. See Gadoffre, *op.cit.*, p.146, for speculation on Berthelot's connection with the work. Gadoffre believes that, with the possible exception of a brief note in fasc.VII, there is nothing in the first draft which does not reflect Claudel's style, ideas and mannerisms, but that Berthelot was probably intended to write up the chapters on broad diplomatic and financial aspects of the Chinese situation, and was still expected to do so in the final draft, though in the event pressure of work forced him to withdraw. Whether or not this was the case, the only way to test the question properly without direct evidence must be to make an exhaustive, chapter-by-chapter stylistic and thematic comparison of the first draft with the diplomatic correspondence and other writings of both men - a task which lies outside the scope of this thesis. Berthelot himself remains an enigmatic figure, who took the precaution of burning most of his personal papers before he died (see Claudel, *Pr.*, p.1277). As far as I have been able to ascertain, there has still been no detailed study of his views during this period, nor has Auguste Bréal's, Philippe Berthelot, (Paris, Gallimard, 1937) been replaced by a more serious biography.

expression of his opinions during his last years in China. Indeed, it is a veritable storehouse of ideas and images which we shall encounter in his later writings on other international questions. It will serve here as the main focus for analysis, though cross-reference or comparison with the later versions and with other texts dating from the pre-war period will, of course, be included where useful. For ease of reference I shall refer to the first draft as if Claudel was solely responsible for it.

B. An Organic Society.

Comprised, as it was, of little more than extended working notes, the discussion of "La Chine et les Chinois" in the first draft offers little direct indication of Claudel's subjective reactions to Chinese society and the Chinese people. Nevertheless, it is valuable because it reveals one of the sides of Claudel which did not emerge in the writings that we examined in the last chapter. Whereas the opinions which he expressed in relation to French society during the pre-1914 period largely took the form of emotional outbursts and crude polemic, his outline of the functioning of Chinese society showed the mentality of the consul whose training was in the dispassionate analysis of facts - especially economic facts - and the distillation of essentials from a mass of disparate evidence. Moreover, as Professor Gadoffre has pointed out, the first draft shows the basic framework of reasoning which was to be somewhat masked by the addition of supplementary detail and other forms of

padding in the later versions.¹

It was, in fact, an eminently positivistic analysis which bound the essential characteristics of Chinese society to "des nécessités foncières".² He started out from a general assumption of which we shall find many echoes in his later writings; namely, that the dominant features of any given society derived from the geographical conformation and natural resources of its environment. Hence, he asserted: "Un pays est une chose qui a une forme et qui est caractérisée par une direction. (...). Un pays est une civilisation, un groupement social au service d'une direction géographique".³ The exposition which followed was disordered and incoherent by comparison with the later versions. However, it was already clear that he considered the basic characteristics of Chinese

1. See Gadoffre, op.cit., p.158. However, Gadoffre is exaggerating when he claims that the first draft is purely the product of Claudel's own first-hand observation, whereas the later drafts show Claudel borrowing details from the work of other writers to pad out his own knowledge. Certainly the borrowings are more overt and more extensive in the later versions. But it is evident that Claudel had already read E. H. Parker's, China, her History, Diplomacy and Commerce, (London, 1901), since he refers to Parker by name (fasc.I, p.7). It is also probable that he had already read Terrien de la Couperie's, Western Origin of the Early Chinese Civilisation, (London, 1894), since many of the comparisons with ancient Egypt, Assyria or Chaldea, which Gadoffre shows to be borrowed from de la Couperie in the later versions, are already present in the first draft (fasc.I, pp.3, 4, 7).
2. fasc.II, p.7.
3. *ibid.*, p.1. The principle is restated at greater length in the second version (see Pr., p.1046), but is not stated in the final version, although it still guides the analysis. For discussion of various literary reflections of Claudel's interest in geography, see CCC IV, especially Jacques Petit, "La Carte chez Claudel", pp.107-122, and Patrice Angelini, "La Géographie symbolique de Claudel: l'Italie", pp.123-148.

society to have been determined, on the one hand, by the fact that it was "un pays fermé", largely surrounded by natural barriers,¹ which meant that its civilisation had developed in virtual isolation and had only been affected to a very slight extent by incursions from outside.² Moreover, the fact that this society had been "élaborée en vase clos" explained why it had preserved ancient patterns of life which had disappeared from other countries.³

On the other hand, the vast interior of the country was characterised by its homogeneity of agricultural resources, and this, in turn, was matched by the homogeneity of Chinese society. The immense mass of the people were engaged in working the same type of arable land and cultivating the same type of products. The circulation of people and products tended to be highly localised since all the necessities of life could be obtained at short distances, and there had never been any reason for the development of durable rivalries between the regions, because they were all fundamentally the same. Thus, Claudel remarked in general terms that China was "un immense bien-fonds, ayant les mêmes besoins partout; cela supprime les différences politiques, conséquence de la suppression des différences sociales".⁴

Claudel maintained that "le trait dominant créateur" of

1. fasc.II, p.1.

2. See *ibid.*, p.2.

3. *ibid.*, p.6.

4. *ibid.*, pp.1-2.

Chinese society was "la transaction".¹ With its high density of population living off the resources of the soil, Chinese life revolved around processes of negotiating, buying, selling, mortgaging, obtaining title to land, and cementing agreements by means of traditional forms of contract; hence "le trait principal du caractère chinois, de tout régler par des compromis, des titres".² This, in turn, accounted for the importance of scribes (the mandarin administrators) in China. As had been the case in ancient Egypt, Assyria or Babylonia, for instance, the prestige and power of the scribes was a natural outcome of the fact that the whole process of transactions and contractual agreements could only function successfully as long as the contracts could be recorded and authenticated. Moreover, the mandarins played another essential function in China by manipulating and exploiting the mass of the people. Claudel observed that the idea of administration according to abstract principles of public good and absolute justice was completely alien to this civilisation. Instead, the society was held in balance by parasitism "exactement à la manière des sociétés animales", and the mandarins played the central role in this process: over the vast, level mass of the population they exercised the function of regulators, preventing the development of major inequalities, mediating in conflicts of interests, or even stirring disputes where necessary.³ As Claudel put it, "le parasite est

1. ibid., p.2.

2. ibid., p.3.

3. ibid., p.4.

attiré et s'applique là où il y a pléthore dans ce corps social".¹

Thus, for example, it was impossible to retain a fortune for long once it had been accumulated, for a mandarin would inevitably intervene to lure its possessor into some form of ruinous business deal. In short, the mandarins presided over a whole system of exploitation, wheeler-dealing, and negotiation which maintained equilibrium:

L'administration est une couche sociale superposée à une autre, comme dans les sociétés animales, la réglementation et la régularisation des conflits amènent le soulagement des inégalités; le corps social a besoin d'être débarrassé de son trop-plein et il se produit ainsi un certain niveau constant auquel il est toujours ramené. Les conflits d'intérêts sont nécessaires au bien public, ils empêchent les trop gros monopoles, la puissance excessive des associations, corporations, congrégations qui, en Chine, se créent naturellement et sans cesse par une sorte d'organisation spontanée, de force nécessaire.

Ainsi: sociétés de scribes et sociétés d'exploiteurs: l'exploitation est légitime et bienfaisante.²

On the one hand, then, Claudel had described a society which he found "très intéressante" as a survival of Antiquity.³ He had also chosen to define its characteristics in positive, rather than negative terms by showing how it had maintained itself in a healthy state of natural balance. However, when he turned to consider the psychology of the Chinese people, his words seemed to imply that he was by no means devoid of a sense of ethnic superiority in relation

1. *ibid.*, pp.4-5.

2. *ibid.*, p.5.

3. *ibid.*, p.4.

to the human products of this civilisation. The first set of traits which he mentioned, used the analogy of rodents:

I° Ce sont des rats, sales, pullulants, granivores, rongeurs, il a une queue, des dents avancées et "ces yeux impitoyables", ricaneurs, curiosité inintelligente éternellement renouvelée, sans tact, sans pudeur, sans initiative, fuyant brusquement, puis acharnés en légions se ruant à l'assaut.¹

His second point was that the Chinese were all traders at heart, whatever their occupation, and his final point was that the Chinaman was "un être collectif".² Apart from "l'absence de nerfs" they had similar mental capacities and feelings to those of Europeans, but their behaviour was conditioned by the fact that they were always part of a group.³ To these comments he subsequently added marginal notes referring to their slow reactions, their laziness of mind, and their "vanité solide, incommensurable".⁴

By the time the book reached its final form, Claudel had tempered some of his cruder generalisations on the nature of the society and the people. He had also filled in some of the gaps in

1. *ibid.*, p.6. Compare with "Le Régime monétaire d'un petit port chinois", (report or article dating from 1904), *CPC IV*, p.135, describing the system of intermediaries used in all Chinese commercial transactions: "Deux principes dominant la question: le premier est que le Chinois est né écornifleur et qu'avec le rat il est l'animal social par excellence."

2. *fasc.II*, p.6.

3. *id.*

4. *id.*

his analysis, while still maintaining the same basic line of explanation. There would be little purpose in making an exhaustive, and inevitably repetitive survey of all the modifications here, but a number of points may usefully be made.

To some extent, Claudel's description had begun to anticipate the nostalgia with which he was often to recall his contact with China when he looked back on it from the vantage-point of his retirement.¹ The country was now described almost lyrically as the last survival of "ces régions heureuses et séquestrées, comme la Mésopotamie et l'Élam, contenues entre le sable et l'eau, où l'Humanité primitive fut versée comme le métal dans une lingotière".² Organic imagery was also frequently used to emphasise how this closed society had developed naturally, without serious upheaval over the centuries. It had thus formed a "système organique et complet",³ which had slowly spread outwards from the centre of the country, gradually absorbing other groups on the periphery with "nulle violence, une alluvion humaine qui s'étale en isolant, en encerclant les corps réfractaires, irréductibles".⁴ The homogeneity of resources and the levelness of the land meant that "la Plante humaine y est aussi uniforme, épandue en nappe aussi égale que les moissons

1. See, for example, "Choses de Chine", (Les Nouvelles littéraires, 22 March 1936), Pr., pp.1020-1025, where Claudel recalls its innocence, colour, vitality, anarchy, religions, the power of the family, its state of natural symbiosis, etc.; also "Préface à un album de photographies d'Hélène Hoppenot", (Le Labyrinthe, 3 Sept. 1946), Pr., pp.393-399.

2. OC IV, pp.15-16.

3. ibid., p.17.

4. ibid., p.18.

interminables de gaoliang et de riz".¹ There might have been occasional revolts or other passing disorders, but there was no deep-rooted divisions in this level world where man had spread "par germination comme une céréale".²

Explaining the collective, relatively egalitarian nature of the society, Claudel now showed the importance of the extended family as "la cellule vitale" under the patriarchal authority of the father.³ In a country where each village was largely self-sufficient there was no property-ownership in the European sense, for in practice (though not in law) land was held undivided by the whole family which might itself form an entire village or several villages farming communally. This basic conditioning in clan membership could, incidentally, be taken to account for the strength of the trade guilds and modern syndicats in China.⁴

On the subject of parasitism and the impossibility of retaining a fortune if one was made, he pointed out that anyone who acquired wealth was immediately surrounded by hoards of impoverished relatives, but, he emphasised, this was "universellement acceptée et imposée"⁵ (though he also added that this levelling of conditions had an unfortunate consequence in so far as it also led to a levelling of abilities).⁶ Moreover, Claudel pointed out that this equality

1. *ibid.*, p.22.

2. *ibid.*, p.25.

3. *ibid.*, p.26.

4. See *ibid.*, p.28.

5. *ibid.*, p.29.

6. *id.*

and, of course, the absence of any meaningful state authority meant that "les rapports des individus entre eux ne peuvent être régis que par la coutume et par un agrément mutuel" in some form of negotiation.¹

As for the system of government and administration, Claudel again stressed that its role was essentially parasitic, but nevertheless valuable in preserving the social balance in a world where everyone was to some extent exploiting others. Hence, he remarked: "Le Gouvernement n'est que l'image de l'état général et personne autrefois ne songeait à s'étonner de ses pratiques ou même à s'en plaindre".² Furthermore, the acceptability of this system had been reinforced by the fact that anyone, regardless of social origin, could manoeuvre or buy his way into the civil service. In this context he added a semi-humorous lament on the recent abolition of the system of examinations which had regulated promotion through the endless hierarchy of grades within the service. They had possessed the outstanding merit of channelling the potentially subversive energies of the intellectuals, "qu'on devrait appeler plutôt les inadaptés", into the harmless pursuit of prestigious but largely meaningless offices, thereby making them allies rather than enemies of the established order.³

His discussion of the psychology of the Chinese people (now expanded to a full chapter and prefaced by the remark that he

1. id.

2. *ibid.*, p.34.

3. *ibid.*, p.37.

realised the artificiality of generalising about "un type national")¹ also deserves some brief comment. Much of this section was still devoted to a clinical account of characteristics which scarcely showed the Chinese in a flattering light: for example, their uniformity of appearance; their lesser physical strength; their capacity for inertia; a slowness of the senses by comparison with the European; their lack of initiative; their inferiority as workers; their rapaciousness; their inability to see beyond short-term interests; their lack of military courage.² Yet, at the end of the chapter he observed that he might have presented "une peinture trop peu aimable" of the Chinese, and proceeded to list their virtues.³ Except for those who had received "l'éducation protestante ou européenne" they were polite and well-mannered to an extent which was no longer known in Europe.⁴ Contrary to popular European belief, the Chinese were by no means incapable of showing gratitude. They were friendly, good-humoured, ingenious, capable of enjoying simple pleasures, and, in the regions of the country which had not been "trop européanisés" they were scrupulously honest in business.⁵ Even those who were addicted to opium did not produce the degrading behaviour which alcohol caused in Europe. He remarked: "Il est rare que l'impression qu'un Européen rapporte d'un long séjour en Chine ne soit pas celle de l'estime et d'une sympathie affectueuse".⁶

1. *ibid.*, p.38.

2. See *ibid.*, pp.40-50.

3. *ibid.*, p.50-51.

4. *ibid.*, p.51.

5. *id.*

6. *ibid.*, p.52.

Finally, the part of the book dealing with Chinese civilisation contained a newly added chapter on Chinese religious beliefs. Again, the overall impression given by his discussion was one of sympathetic, if somewhat patronising understanding. At the outset he observed that he was using the word religion in a purely conventional sense, since the Chinese had no equivalent of the Christian, Islamic or Judaic conception of a personal God. However, if the word was taken to cover any form of transcendental belief, then China, in this area as in others, was a fascinating survival of the past:

De ce point de vue la Chine offre à l'observateur un spectacle d'un intérêt peut-être sans égal. Tout l'ensemble de traditions, de spéculations et d'imaginations qui constituait le système religieux de l'Antiquité classique, le paganisme, nous le retrouvons en Chine agissant et vivant: nous devenons les contemporains du passé, des gens pensent autour de nous à peu près comme pensaient le vieux Caton et la matrone de Juvénal. En Chine comme dans l'Empire romain, et à la différence de l'Inde, aucune des doctrines élaborées par l'esprit religieux n'a pris avec le temps de force suffisante pour évincer les autres; toutes se sont ensemble combinées tant bien que mal en une sorte de syncrétisme aussi intéressant que ces sites naturels qui sont l'oeuvre de forces diverses et contraires.¹

The idea underlying the whole chapter was that in China - described at one point as "ce conservatoire des vieux ustensiles de l'humanité"² - could be found sets of beliefs which, though pagan and superficially obscure to the modern European, were in fact the reflection of fundamental needs of the human mind. Thus, to take but one example, the idolatry of the Sun, the Moon and the elements could be described as catering to a "besoin d'interpellation, qui réside dans

1. *ibid.*, p.54.

2. *ibid.*, p.65.

le coeur de tout homme" - a natural instinct to represent and communicate with "les objets qui nous frappent le plus vivement".¹

Obviously there were many aspects of the old China which did hold a strong appeal for Claudel. His references to the country as "un pays fermé" and to Chinese society as having developed tranquilly within a "vase clos" serve as implicit reminders that the motif of enclosure constantly recurs in Claudel's writings during this period to evoke the idea of a form or entity which is in some sense harmoniously complete and ordered within itself. Thus, for example, Claudel's image of eternity in his Art poétique was that of a circle and "une fermeture".² His symbol for the universe was also, as he once told Massignon, that of "le cercle, le zéro, l'oeuf, le germe. Vous pouvez élargir indéfiniment la circonférence, ses propriétés restent les mêmes... Il y a fermeture".³ Moreover, as we saw earlier, marriage and the monastic life could both be seen as forms of enclosure: hence his words to Massignon in November 1908: "Un homme non marié ou non consacré n'a pas reçu d'ordre, il reste ouvert et imparfait. Le sacrement remplace la sainte clôture".⁴

1. ibid., p.55. See also, for example, ibid., pp.57, 69.

2. Po., p.203.

3. Letter to Massignon, 24 Feb. 1911, Corres.PC-LM, p.108. For other similar uses of the idea in the context of his metaphysical speculation, see, for example, letters to Frizeau, 6 Sept. 1905 and 12 July 1907, Corres.PC-FJ/GF, pp.58, 106; letter to Georges Polti, 10 Dec. 1907, in "Deux lettres inédites de Paul Claudel à Georges Polti", Résonances, 129, Feb. 1965, p.7: themes discussed in Georges Poulet, Les Métamorphoses du cercle, Paris, Plon, 1961, pp.477-496; André Vachon, Le Temps et l'espace dans l'oeuvre de Paul Claudel, Paris, Seuil, 1965, *passim*.

4. Letter to Massignon, 19 Nov. 1908, Corres.PC-LM, p.54.

Moreover, although he himself had not sought to draw contentious comparisons between Chinese society and that of his own country, there had nevertheless been implicit reminders of general ideas which he expressed in relation to France - notably, his ideal of society as a living, united body based on traditional values, personal contact, practical charity to "le prochain", the strength of the family, and development of other forms of association at grass-roots level, as opposed to the formal, rationalistic shell of legal rights, iron codes, the power of the centralised State, class struggle and the sterile, divisive ferment created by alienated intellectuals. Furthermore, whatever the imperfections of the Chinese people, he regarded them with affection, and although they were pagans, he was prepared to describe their religious beliefs with a degree of sympathy.

Yet, if comparisons are to be artificially drawn between his description of China and his views on French society during the pre-war years, it is as well to remember that even during this period when his thought was particularly marked by reaction against many of the values and institutions of his own country, there were suggestions that his traditionalism was not as wholehearted as that of some of his compatriots. As we have seen, he was prepared to allow that the Revolution had to some extent been justified as the expression of a desire to form a rational, explicable society no longer depending purely on tradition, and as a refusal to continue to be "dirigé(s) comme les bêtes par le seul instinct, par la coutume".¹ On the other hand, Chinese society was, as he knew, a "société quasi-fossile", a

1. Letter to Suarès, 10 Feb. 1911, Corres.PC-AS, p.159.

last survival of the past.¹ It was based entirely on instinct, tradition and the haphazard consequences of its isolated situation. Equally, Claudel's ideal of moral unity in French society was formulated in terms of consciously recognising the God-given mutual need arising from complementary differences between unique individuals. But, in his description, China and the Chinese constituted a uniform, collective mass with very little internal differentiation. The society itself was the mirror of a geographical environment which did not form "un corps dont les organes sont complémentaires l'un à l'autre", but "une masse spongieuse dont les cellules se trouvent à des degrés différents de saturation".²

Be that as it may, even at the time when Claudel had been writing the first draft in 1905, the state of balance which he had described was already severely undermined.³ In the regions most closely affected by foreign influence the traditional patterns of Chinese life had been deeply eroded. New tensions had been created. Partisans of the old ways were opposed by a growing reformist movement. From 1901 onwards the Manchu dynasty had itself introduced a programme of educational, administrative and military reforms in

1. OC IV, p. 15.

2. ibid., p.20.

3. Most of the information in this paragraph is synthesised from Harold M. Vinacke, A History of the Far East in Modern Times, London, Allen & Unwin, 1960, pp. 146-224; Jean Chesneaux, Marianne Bastid, Marie-Claire Bergère (trans. by Anne Destenay), China from the Opium Wars to the 1911 Revolution, New York, Pantheon, 1976, pp. 344-357. References to calls by the Americans and the Chinese for international conferences are in Hosea B. Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, Vol.III, reprinted Taipei, Ch'eng Wen Publishing Co., 1971, pp.346, 369.

the direction of modernisation: by 1905 these changes had as yet been more nominal than real, but the long-term consequences were unpredictable. Moreover, the presence of the imperialist Powers had been acting as a destabilising influence in other ways. Foreign trade with China had been constantly increasing since the 1890s, under the provisions of the "unequal treaties", but the balance showed a permanent deficit against China. Foreign investment in the modern sector of the Chinese economy had also been increasing, but the development of modern transportation and industry was fragmentary, unco-ordinated and distorted by the intense competition between the rival Powers. Furthermore, this competition still threatened, in itself, to lead to wider disruption of the country. The extent to which the Powers were prepared to co-operate together in the interests of balance had hitherto been very limited. The "open-door" policy inaugurated in 1899, or collaboration in producing the joint Protocol of 1901 had, perhaps, been steps in that direction, but proposals for round-table international conferences on contentious issues such as treaty-revision had fallen on deaf ears. And, of course, in 1904-1905 the Russo-Japanese War was ample proof that rivalry in seeking bigger slices of the prey was by no means abating.

In 1905 Claudel had already been aware of these factors. His attitude towards them is obviously of central importance, and it is on this score that some correction needs to be made to the interpretation offered by Gilbert Gadoffre in his Claudel et l'univers chinois.

C. Imperialism (1): Professor Gadoffre's Assessment of Claudel's Position

Professor Gadoffre's assessment of Claudel's position is stated in the form of general conclusions, following what is virtually a chapter-by-chapter summary of the various drafts. I shall argue later that his conclusions need to be modified because his summary overlooks crucial elements, especially in the first draft which he himself considers to be the most revealing. However, since my objection to his interpretation stems more from what he does not include, than from what he does include, and since it is necessary in any case to establish the broad outline of the convoluted evidence under discussion, the first step must be to give a résumé of Professor Gadoffre's summary of the chapters in question.

In his discussion of the first draft, Gadoffre observes that in Chapter II, "L'Europe en Chine", Claudel had started out from the straightforward question of whether European influence in China had been injurious or beneficial:

Claudel se contente, ici, de poser une question: la présence et l'action de l'Europe ont-elles été utiles ou nuisibles à la Chine? La réponse est formelle: nuisible. Sans s'encombrer de phrases sur les bienfaits de la colonisation dont ses contemporains se contentaient, il ne voit dans la présence européenne en Chine que le contact de deux civilisations trop différentes 'dont l'une a exercé sur l'autre une action destructrice', et il précise sa pensée en s'appuyant sur des observations:(...).¹

1. Gadoffre, op.cit., p.149, (refers to fasc.II, p.9).

There follows a summary of the observations in point.¹

European activity had destroyed the economic balance in China, disrupting the circulation of products, supplanting the Chinese in lucrative fields, levying financial exactions, and causing immense suffering among the native population. The combination of economic subjection and military defeats had also undermined the prestige of the Emperor, leading to tensions within the realm as a whole. Furthermore, the process of disintegration had been hastened by clumsy, piecemeal attempts to bolster the State by grafting European administrative structures onto the existing Chinese system, thereby bringing further chaos and friction. Gadoffre continues:

Caudel conclut en affirmant - après Eugène Simon - que 'ce qui reste solide en Chine, c'est la force d'une civilisation agricole conservatrice', et il n'y a de vraiment sain en Chine que ce qui se trouve à l'ouest de la ligne Pékin - Hankeou - Canton, à l'écart des contaminations européennes. A l'est de cette ligne, ce qui a été touché par les Blancs se décompose.

Ce chapitre hardi et agressif, dont la publication eût été impensable en 1909, disparaîtra des versions ultérieures.²

Given this interpretation of Chapter II, Professor Gadoffre's summary of subsequent chapters leaves the impression that the draft was a curious hotch-potch. The outline for a chapter on "Les Missions" revolved largely around defending the Catholic missionaries'

1. See Gadoffre, pp.149-150, (corresponds to fasc.II, pp.9-20).

2. Gadoffre, p.151, (corresponds to fasc.II, p.20).

involvement in business affairs, and pointing out that their direct contact with the Chinese could give them a vital role as intermediaries between the French residents and the natives, if only the French were more willing to recognise the fact.¹ The chapter on education discussed the question of extending French cultural influence in China, remarked that the British had an unassailable lead in providing schooling for the Chinese, but pointed out that rather than concentrating on schools in China itself, the best policy would be to send Chinese students to France where they could properly absorb French culture.²

The chapters discussing the mentality and business methods of the Europeans in China were particularly scathing. Conditioned by the privilege of extraterritoriality, they were portrayed as complacent, ignorant of the country, the people, and the language, and unwilling to leave the concessions to make direct contact with their native trading clientele.³ There were also what Professor Gadoffre describes as "les pages impitoyables consacrées aux différentes variétés de Blancs".⁴ The British were honest in business but they were indolent, unintelligent, unadventurous and had failed to take advantage of the uniquely favourable situation which they enjoyed in China. The Germans, on the other hand, were described as dynamic, efficient, and intelligent: even their brutality was seen to be

1. See Gadoffre, p.151, (corresponds to fasc.II, pp.21-24).

2. See Gadoffre, pp.151-152, (corresponds to fasc.II, pp.25-36).

3. See Gadoffre, p.152, (corresponds to fasc.III, pp.1-3).

4. Gadoffre, p.152, (corresponds to fasc.III, pp.4-27).

advantageous. But the French were judged "sans ménagements",¹ for although there had been interesting initiatives and some impressive commercial achievements, these had not been co-ordinated or followed up, and the large French firms tended to be appallingly unenterprising. Furthermore, while the consuls were capable and hard-working, the same was not true of the Legation, and the work of the consuls was in any case hampered by the internal régime of the French concessions where the laws and codes of France were applied without any allowance for local conditions.

There were also chapters on various aspects of the Chinese economy. In the section dealing with commercial geography Claudel could be found arguing for the extension of rail links to improve the circulation of products from North to South and vice-versa. Equally, he pointed to the need for opening up routes through the barriers of mountains which obstructed communications between the interior and the coastal regions.² Another chapter synthesised consular reports which Claudel had previously written on the chaos of the monetary system.³ A chapter on industrial development gave a somewhat jaundiced history of what had been achieved, and pointed to the many factors, both on the Chinese and the European sides, which had prevented the rapid economic progress that had once been expected.⁴

Lastly, having mentioned the existence of a chapter entitled "Entente possible de l'Europe contre le Japon", Professor Gadoffre

1. Gadoffre, p.153.

2. See *ibid.*, p.155, (corresponding to fasc.IV).

3. See Gadoffre, p.155, (corresponds to fasc.V, pp.1-9).

4. See Gadoffre, pp.155-156, (corresponds to fasc.V, pp.10-30).

briefly alludes to a set of notes on the policies of the Powers, the commercial and financial interests at stake, and the general principles on which French policy was officially based. Gadoffre suggests that these notes might well have been intended to be written up by Berthelot.¹

In discussing the later versions Gadoffre points out that Claudel had chosen the path of prudence in steering away from subjective judgements. The chapter dealing with "L'Europe en Chine" now consisted largely of an impersonal historical survey of European contact with China, followed by a "portrait-charge" of the expatriates which, though still unflattering, was slightly counter-balanced by a few conventional remarks naming Frenchmen who had sacrificed themselves for the cause of humanity, honour and duty in China - these remarks being supplemented, in turn, by a paragraph (which may not have been added until the book was on the verge of publication in 1947) to the effect that the order introduced "tant bien que mal" by the Europeans had given China the most materially prosperous period of her history.² Equally, there was little trace of critical comment in the chapters on the monetary system, commerce and industry, though Claudel did point out in the latter that China's deficit in trade with Europe was progressively impoverishing her.³

1. See Gadoffre, pp.156-157, (corresponds to fascs.VI and VII).

2. See Gadoffre, p.166, (corresponds to OC IV, pp.76-93).

3. See Gadoffre, p.162, (corresponds to OC IV, pp.94-127).

Finally, there was a hastily written, incisive, and seemingly incomplete chapter on "La Position actuelle des Puissances", assessing the relative strength in China of the major Powers.¹ As Professor Gadoffre puts it, Britain was "toisée sans indulgence"² for her absurd treaty with Japan, her timidity and weakness which had made her miss every chance to play a decisive role as arbitrator since 1895, and had thus cost her much of her former ascendancy. The French, too, had missed their opportunities for expansion, though in this case Claudel attributed the major fault to the French businessmen, bankers and industrialists in China, on the grounds that they never looked beyond short-term interests. Little was said on the subject of Germany, but Claudel now doubted that her efforts would bring any great advantages. Equally, he doubted whether the United States would do much more than bluff despite its commercial successes. Meanwhile, Japan was pursuing expansionist designs which were beyond her own resources. Eventually - human nature being as it was - she would attempt to conquer new regions of China, but he doubted whether she would be able to assimilate her conquests, since she had always shown a notable inability to treat the Chinese with any consideration for their native customs and traditions. That left Russia, the only country which was situated in an essential, organic relation with China, and was therefore led, as if by natural instinct to expand in this direction. Russia's defeat by Japan in 1905 had merely been a temporary check, and he foresaw that in the future she would take and digest a massive empire.

1. See Gadoffre, pp.163-165, (corresponds to OC IV, pp.128-140).

2. *ibid.*, p.163.

Professor Gadoffre's overall conclusions give the impression that Claudel's view of imperialist activity in China was fundamentally negative. On the one hand, Claudel's viewpoint owed much to his affection for the Chinese people (or at least for the ordinary working Chinese as opposed to the mandarins) and to his sympathy for the changeless, traditional agrarian civilisation which he still fondly imagined to exist in the eastern half of the country.¹

Conversely, Claudel was convinced that in the western half of China, where European influence was strongest, the effect of the foreign presence had been destructive and contaminating. This belief was "pour le moins surprenante à une époque où l'idéologie colonialiste triomphait", but Claudel only rallied to the notion of the mission civilisatrice after the First World War.² At no time while he was serving in China had he considered European influence to be other than harmful - at least on the temporal level. Yet Professor Gadoffre does mention a memorandum which Claudel sent to Berthelot in 1906, arguing that Britain, France and Germany should set up an international commission to take control of Chinese finance and administration, while at the same time preventing the extension of Japanese influence. This, Gadoffre explains as a contradiction:

Lui qui avait dénoncé les méfaits de la présence européenne en Chine ne peut imaginer la guérison du mal par autre chose que le mal. Toute évolution spontanée de la Chine étant exclue, seule une intervention concertée des Puissances imposant à l'Empire une tutelle économique et un programme de grands travaux pourrait le faire sortir de l'impasse.³

1. See Gadoffre, pp.168-169, 172.

2. *ibid.*, p.169.

3. *ibid.*, p.171. The 'note' in question is entitled "Entente possible de l'Europe contre le Japon", 1906, ASPC. Gadoffre also points out that a set of notes written by Berthelot show that he too believed in the need for this solution.

I do not intend to argue that these conclusions are absolutely without foundation. However, I would suggest that they do not do justice to the complexity of Claudel's thought, and that they weigh the balance far too heavily on the side of his alleged condemnation of European activity. Are we to infer that at heart Claudel (and, presumably, Berthelot) despised everything that he himself represented as an agent of French interests, but that he chose to mask the fact when he came to write up the later versions? Undoubtedly the first draft is the most revealing, but it reveals something different from what Professor Gadoffre has seen. It has an internal coherency which is not reflected in his summary and it contains three important chapters which the summary does not take into consideration.¹ What the draft shows above all is the thinking of an enlightened imperialist.

D. Imperialism (2): Claudel's Acceptance of the Principle.

The crucial Chapter II, "L'Europe en Chine", did not, in fact, pose the question of the Europeans' role in quite the straightforward terms described by Professor Gadoffre, nor did Claudel give such an unequivocal answer. At the beginning of the chapter, before discussing the practical consequences of the European presence, he had raised a wider question of principle: for centuries China had remained isolated, but now, in the modern, expanding world did she still have the right to do so?

1. These chapters appear in fasc.I and are not numbered, though they were evidently intended to figure at the end of the book: they were entitled: "Organisation d'une Banque Française en Chine", (pp.3-5); "Indochine", (pp.6-21); "Conclusions générales", (pp.22-31).

Claud l asserted that she did not, and in this context the image of the living organism could be used to reinforce the idea that China had been justifiably brought into contact with the rest of humanity. Only then did he move on to deal with the problem of how this had affected China. The passage ran as follows:

Cette civilisation s' tait d velopp e sur elle-m me et  tait rest e ferm e, aussi  trang re   la n tre que les anciennes civilisations de Babylone. Les Europ ens qui avaient  volu  se trouv rent en contact avec elle au milieu du XIXe si cle. Ici se pose la question: 1  Quel est le droit d'un pays   rester ferm ? Les autres nations peuvent-elles l'obliger   s'ouvrir? En vertu du droit qu'a un organisme de communiquer dans toutes ses parties, on est intervenu: on envoie des exp ditions dans les champs glac s du p le, dans les br lantes r gions d sertiques du Sahara: comment s'imaginer qu'un peuple de 300 millions d'hommes puisse  chapper   la connaissance et aux rapports avec les autres: comment admettre qu'une si grande partie de l'humanit  reste ferm e, soustraite   la circulation des grands courants commerciaux et civilisateurs. (Last two words added in ink). 2  L'action de l'Europe a-t-elle  t  utile ou nuisible? Nuisible certainement. (Marginal note: A expliquer et qualifier).¹

The second question led directly to Claud l's analysis of the effects of European activity, showing how the old China, which had formerly been based on an " quilibre amorphe instinctif existant par une sorte de consentement tacite", had been disrupted and undermined.² Indeed, besides the examples cited by Gadoffre, it even included other destructive factors, such as the social damage caused by the introduction of opium, the corruption and demoralisation of the mandarin class, or the depreciation of the currency.³ Moreover, it

1. fasc.II, p.9.

2. *ibid.*, p.19.

3. See *ibid.*, pp.10-11.

pointed out that the Chinese were incapable of grasping Western conceptions of organisation or administration, and there was perhaps a hint of Claudel's own distaste for the rigid centralisation and institutionalism of his own country when he remarked: "Une unité rigide, extérieure, mécanique, imposée à tous sans distinction, voilà le régime que l'Europe apporte avec elle partout et dont elle ne peut se passer: les Chinois ne le comprennent pas".¹

However, despite the fact that the chapter as a whole showed Claudel to be intensely aware of the destructive effects of the European presence, his approach remained trenchantly analytical rather than emotional. Contrary to the impression given by Professor Gadoffre, the chapter did not end with a sterile, anguished condemnation of Western influence. Having stated the reality of the situation as he saw it, what concerned Claudel was to offer a practical solution which would prevent China from further decomposition, and that solution, he maintained, could only be the extension of European control. His conclusions were stated in the following terms:

La Chine est un produit artificiel, si l'Europe se retire d'elle, elle tombera en décomposition, en pourriture; politiquement c'est une fiction diplomatique; l'administration chinoise n'existe pas par elle-même, c'est un organisme parasite, superposé. (Francqui disait que l'on peut tracer une ligne, celle du chemin de fer Canton-Hankéou-Pékin: tout ce qui est à l'Est est la partie détachable, même par une désagrégation, et subit l'action de l'Europe; tout ce qui est à l'Ouest, c'est la vieille Chine, intacte, qu'il faut laisser mûrir). (Marginal note: Faux). Il reste la force agglutinante des moeurs, des mêmes

1. *ibid.*, p.13.

habitudes; ce qui reste solide en Chine c'est la force d'une civilisation agricole, conservatrice. Mais elle a besoin de s'organiser: elle ne peut continuer à vivre avec ce régime spongieux: (Marginal note: Indifférence de la masse - puissance des minorités). Il faut créer de grands organes de circulation, les anciens, route de Melin, grands canaux sont abandonnés, ensablés. Il faut de grands troncs artériels, des routes qui rétablissent l'unité dans le pays et ne peuvent être l'oeuvre que d'une administration européenne qui arrêtera ainsi la dissolution de la Chine au contact d'une civilisation différente à (word missing) de l'Europe. (Marginal note: Tout ceci est un peu confus et comporte de nouveaux développements).¹

As a whole this chapter does not, therefore, give a purely negative impression. Nor is it certain that Claudel would have considered the further extension of European activity in quite such unequivocal terms as "la guérison du mal par ... le mal". His position was evidently far more ambivalent than that. There was, of course, a side of him which was sympathetic to the closed, organic, picturesque society of old China. However, as his remarks at the start of the chapter showed (and it should be noted that he was to repeat them with only minor changes of wording in the later versions) he was prepared to justify imperialism as a historical process, regardless of its immediate practical effects.² He was, after all, a European and an agent of international trade, so it is

1. *ibid.*, pp.20-21.

2. See *OC* IV, p.83: "Sur la question de la légitimité de la guerre de 1842, sur le droit qu'avait l'Angleterre de forcer les portes d'une partie du monde qui prétendait à l'isolement, on a versé beaucoup d'encre inutile. Il faut voir là simplement un épisode de ce grand mouvement d'expansion, de conquête et de curiosité qui au XIXe siècle poussait l'Europe à prendre conscience de toutes les parties de la planète. Quand les Pôles eux-mêmes et le Centre de l'Afrique attiraient tant d'explorateurs, comment l'Extrême-Orient aurait-il pu maintenir ses cloisons?"

understandable that his thinking should have been marked by the expansionist mentality of the age.

Obviously there was an element of contradiction in his thinking, but it was not an entirely unexpected one. In his book, Claudiel et l'usurpateur, Jacques Petit has shown the recurrence in Claudel's plays and a number of his prose works of an underlying pattern of domination and submission which allowed an act of aggression - be it physical, emotional, spiritual or political - against a weak or innocent victim to be justified in terms of a positive result, higher necessity, or some form of closer reconciliation between the aggressor and the victim.¹ In the case which concerns us here, Claudel's opening justification of colonialism provides a microcosmic example of this type of reasoning. The weak, and in many ways admirable victim was archaic, inward-looking China, subjected to the incursion of imperialist Powers whose justification was that they represented the dynamic forces of an expanding modern world, in which China must needs take her place among the rest of mankind. A few years later, in a somewhat different context, the same mode of thinking led Claudel to make light of the past sufferings of the Czechs at the hands of imperial Austria, and to see their present nationalistic mood as the lamentable symptom of "je ne sais quelle aversion du dehors, quelle propension à se bloquer sur soi-même, un provincialisme jaloux et hargneux plus digne d'une tribu d'Afrique que d'un peuple européen".²

Furthermore, Claudel's justification of opening up China to the world equally contained echoes of the theory of universal unity

1. See Jacques Petit, Claudiel et l'usurpateur, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1971.

2. Letter to Miloš Marten, 22 Jan. 1912, in CPC IX, p.146.

which was outlined in his Art poétique and various other writings during the pre-war years. The first draft of Sous le signe did not allude to a divine intention behind colonial expansion, but the idea of a necessity for establishing closer temporal links with hitherto isolated elements of the human race formed an implicit parallel with his conception of mutual need uniting all created beings in the metaphysical realm. Moreover, it tied in with Claudel's notion of the universal commedia dell'arte, which man was now in a better position to comprehend than ever before:

Et jadis notre observation n'était que de ce cercle le plus étroit qui nous contouche, la pierre où notre pied choppe, en sortant, cet homme qui éternue à notre coude. Mais aujourd'hui nous pouvons embrasser autour de nous des figures plus vastes et plus riches. Chaque matin, le journal nous donne la physionomie de la terre, l'état de la politique, le bilan des échanges. Nous possédons le présent dans sa totalité, tout l'ouvrage se fait sous nos yeux; toute la ligne du futur apparaît sur le rouleau d'impression qui l'attire.¹

This leads to another related set of considerations. Some two years after the writing of the first draft of Sous le signe, Claudel began to compose his ode, "La Maison fermée", in which he lyrically described his aspiration to be "le rassembleur de la terre de Dieu".² Caring little, he piously claimed, for vain human glories or "ce juste laurier dont vous ceignez les tempes des conquérants et des Césars, réunisseurs de la terre", his own desire was to be a poet-Columbus uniting and exalting the world in his verses, ever mindful of his God-given need for his brothers, who were all mankind.³ In

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1. Po., p.145. Compare the words of Lâla in La Ville II, Th.I, p. 463: "La science a livré le monde à l'homme et maintenant voici qu'à chaque homme sont donnés tous les hommes et que l'humanité intégrale est constituée comme un corps...". Also the words of Nageoire in praise of the telegraph bringing trade information from all over the world, in L'Échange I, Th.I, p.872. These themes are to some extent anticipated in their turn by Tête d'Or's desire to conquer the world.
 2. ibid., pp.281-282.
 3. ibid., p.281. The theme is anticipated in La Ville II, Th.I, p.487, where Coeuvre announces that the whole of mankind is like "un homme unique", with a shared duty to dedicate the world to God.

practice, of course, he did not always act as if non-Catholics were his brothers, but, as we have seen previously, he could argue that those who placed themselves outside the Church were denying the true foundation of brotherhood, or, as he put it to Gide in July 1908: "Il n'y a pas de Christ russe ou anglais ou allemand, mais un Christ catholique dans une église qui n'est exclusive que parce qu'elle est universelle et dans une vérité qui n'est intransigeante que parce qu'elle est totale".¹

If then, as Claudel believed, universality was the very essence of Catholicism, it would be logical to expect him to have seen imperialism as also being justified on the time-honoured grounds that the Cross could follow the flag - especially since the pursuit of anticlerical policies at home had not prevented the Republic from continuing its traditional protection of the missionary orders in the colonies. This was not, in fact, among the questions explicitly raised in the first draft of Sous le signe. However, it is interesting to note that in the final version a brief set of comments touching on the subject was included at the start of his chapter on European influence.

Having had contacts with a number of missionaries in China, Claudel had no doubt been kept informed of the progress of efforts to convert the native population. He had naturally been overjoyed to learn that they seemed to be achieving considerable success, and the rising number of conversions had prompted him to speculate in a letter to Massignon on 12 October 1908:

1. Letter to Gide, 30 July 1908, Corres.PC-AG, p.85.

Vous savez sans doute quel admirable mouvement de conversions se produit actuellement dans le Nord de la Chine. Dans le seul Vicariat de Pékin qui est l'un des quatre vicariats du Tche-Li il y a eu l'année dernière près de quinze mille baptêmes d'adultes et l'on est obligé de retarder le mouvement des conversions par suite du petit nombre de missionnaires. Qui sait si la lumière ne revient pas en ce moment vers l'Orient et si l'Occident ne va pas entrer dans une de ces périodes de jachère sabbatique dont parle le Lévitique?¹

In other words, he could look to the evangelical triumphs of the missionaries as a Providential consolation for the trials of the Church in France. He knew perfectly well that Catholic proselytising had played its own part in undermining the traditional patterns of Chinese life, and when he referred to the matter in the final draft of Sous le signe he was willing enough to justify the fact. Furthermore, he did so in terms which come as a striking illustration that he was not in reality a single-minded enemy of the idea of progress, so long as he could harness it to Catholicism. When he explained how the insertion of Catholicism had contributed to the upheaval of China, not only did he portray the changelessness of Asia in negative terms, but he also intimated that Christianity, by its dynamic nature, had been the very source of progress in the Western world.

In the pagan countries of Asia, he asserted, the European could not help but be struck by the fact that the history of these races gave an overwhelming impression of stagnation, for "nulle part on ne voit ce qu'on est généralement convenu d'appeler le progrès, ou ce que Bossuet appelait la Suite des Empires, nulle part un sens, un

1. In Corres.PC-LM, pp.49-50.

développement, une évolution".¹ In Asia events occurred, dynasties rose and fell, but nothing fundamentally altered, because these countries had never known the "prodigieux ferment de discorde et de civilisation qu'est le Christianisme et qui ne permet plus la paix aux peuples chez lesquels il a profondément pénétré."²

He moved on to emphasise that, contrary to popular belief, Catholicism had not been tolerated with equanimity by the Chinese, once they had recognised the force which it represented. It had created a ferment and often aggressive reactions - including the martyrdom of missionaries and converts - because it had introduced a spiritual leaven, accompanied by a body of doctrine which ran directly counter to many of the beliefs and customs of Chinese society. In addition, it had come to the closed world of China bringing with it "au sens suprême le principe d'exterritorialité", membership of "une cellule étrangère, l'Église", above local or national ties and all temporal authority.³ Now that the old China was dissolving and the missionaries had a virtually free hand, "leur moisson s'accroît et c'est par dizaines de mille" that they were obtaining conversions in certain parts of the Empire.⁴

1. OC IV, p.76.

2. ibid., p.77. See also, letter to Gide, 8 July 1909, Corres. PC-AG, p.107: "Le chrétien seul connaît le désir. Et le voyageur qui voit ces vastes civilisations orientales inertes comprend quel inestimable ferment a été le Christianisme. Précisément parce qu'il n'est aucune partie de la nature humaine qu'il ait laissé en repos."

3. id.

4. ibid., p.79.

In short, there is a vital distinction to be made between Claudel's belief that in practice the imperialist Powers had made an awful mess of China, and the fact that he evidently did not condemn imperialism in principle. In this light the reasoning behind the first draft becomes even more comprehensible. Because he was sympathetic towards the old China he was particularly sensitive to the disruption and suffering caused to the Chinese as a result of haphazard, clumsy, incoherent policies pursued by the imperialist Powers, and he wanted to see China being offered the advantages rather than the degradations of colonial rule. At the same time he also believed that the establishment of a new balance in China was very much in the interests of the imperialist Powers themselves. Thus, in subsequent chapters of the first draft, while lambasting the deficiencies of present policies and of his fellow-expatriates themselves, the whole direction of his analysis was towards demonstrating the need for a programme of reforms which would be to the advantage of the Chinese people and of the imperialist Powers, especially France.

E. Imperialism (3): The Programme of Development.

Within the overall framework of Claudel's proposals, some of his arguments dealt with action which France might take unilaterally, while others referred to the need for co-ordinating policies with other Powers. As to the first category, his attention was focussed on questions relating to Indo-China as well as China itself, although he was not concerned with the immensely complex internal problems of

Indo-China. His own preoccupation was with what he saw as the wasted opportunity for France to evolve a more ambitious colonial policy in the Far East to link the economic development of Indo-China with the consolidation of French interests in the southern provinces of China. As an agent in the field, it grieved him that those who directed policy from Paris continued to treat Indo-China as if it were some minor colony to be assimilated, instead of allowing the Governor-General wide freedom of action to pursue "une politique qui est évidemment celle de la France dans les grandes lignes, mais a une quantité de points qui lui sont propres".¹

In this respect, he looked back with some admiration to the period when Paul Doumer had been Governor and had attempted - "un peu à l'aveuglette", Claudel remarked condescendingly - to create an Indo-Chinese foreign policy within the wider orbit of French policy as a whole.² To his credit in Claudel's eyes, Doumer had at least taken an interest in furthering French influence in the towns of southern China, by fostering public works, subsidising maritime transport companies, establishing personal contacts with the Chinese Viceroys, and sending rice to these areas in time of famine. With

1. fasc.I, p.7. These and most of the other arguments relating to Indo-China also appear in more compressed note form in fasc.VII, pp.3-6.

2. fasc.I, p.10. For a useful general discussion of Doumer's activities in Indo-China (1897-1902) within the wider context of French imperial policy, see Stephen H. Roberts, History of French Colonial Policy 1870-1925, reprinted London, Frank Cass, 1963, pp.451-466.

a trace of wistfulness Claudel noted: "Quelques années, on a eu l'impression que l'Indo-Chine allait donner à la France une voix de plus dans le concert des Puissances".¹

Claudel had evidently been impressed by the way in which Britain pursued her colonial development by allowing a very large area of autonomy to her major overseas possessions (in contrast to the French method of assimilation and rigid centralised control from Paris).² As an example of what the Governor of Indo-China should be doing, he cited the role which had been played by the Viceroys of India in working out their own policies for extending British influence over the surrounding territories and down through the Persian Gulf.³

In Claudel's view, the initial priority for Indo-China was to ensure a close working liaison between the Governor and the French Minister at Peking.⁴ Trade links, and in particular the exportation of rice to China (a long-standing consular preoccupation of Claudel's) should be strengthened by the introduction of new maritime services and direct distribution of goods to avoid the costly, inefficient and humiliating process of channelling them all through British Hong Kong, as they were at present.⁵ At the same time, from

1. fasc.I, p.10.
2. For general discussion of contrasting British and French approaches (somewhat critical of French methods), see Roberts, op.cit., pp.64-74.
3. See fasc.I, p.8. Reference was made particularly to Lord Curzon "qui a pris des mesures d'intérêt non seulement indien mais impérial".
4. See *ibid.*, p.11; also *ibid.*, p.6, where Claudel complains in general terms that among the French administrators, colonialists and journalists in Indo-China "il règne ... l'ignorance la plus absolue sur la Chine".
5. See *ibid.*, pp.16-17. For discussion of Claudel's consular reports and memoranda relative to the rice question, see Gadoffre, op.cit., pp.105-107.

within Indo-China, the French should pursue a systematic "politique de frontière".¹ On the one hand, following the example of the Russians, the Japanese and the Germans within their own spheres of influence, this would mean working to obtain a right of control over the designation of the Chinese administrative authorities in the regions bordering on Indo-China, while at the same time using secret funds to ensure the allegiance of the local Chinese officials.² On the other hand, it would mean extending influence over the native population by such means as educational work, development of contacts with local notables, and in surveying and exploiting natural resources on both sides of the frontiers, creating employment, inducing Chinese businessmen to invest in Indo-China and to share in the running of its major commercial concerns.³

Thus, it should be noted that, while Claudel had not entered into discussion of abstract questions of assimilationist or associationist colonial theory, the ideas which he had in mind for Indo-China corresponded in general terms to the type of demands for reform which were being increasingly heard from the French colonies

1. fasc.I, p.11.

2. See *ibid.*, pp.13-14. Claudel later added the marginal note: "Je crois encore cette politique de frontières parfaitement praticable et de nature à éviter beaucoup de pertes de sang et d'argent. C'est une arme à deux tranchants, pour nous et (word illegible) la Chine. Mais il y faudrait 1° beaucoup d'argent 2° des agents expérimentés et connaissant la langue du pays. Contre: v. dans les brochures de Bertrand, la manière dont on l'a traité, lui et le maréchal Son (bien qu'il y ait à dire sur les deux). En parler à (name illegible)."

3. See *ibid.*, pp.11-21.

and within France itself for a less timid, more flexible, more far-sighted view of the relationship between France and the overseas territories, on the grounds that allowing the colonies to assert themselves as more distinct political and economic entities would ultimately bring far greater benefits to France.¹

Beyond the development of Indo-China and the Chinese border provinces, Claudel's awareness of the existing limitations of French influence in China led him to think primarily in terms of co-operation with other European Powers.² One scheme which held a particular appeal for him was the idea of establishing a locally based French banking concern in China to channel vast capital investment into the country from abroad and forge close links with the Chinese merchant classes. Although he saw the initiative coming from France, he believed that Belgium, and perhaps Germany, could be interested in the scheme, but not the British, since it would initially appear as a rival to the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Co. (in addition to which he saw them as too unadventurous).³

1. For discussion of the growing pressure in favour of associationism from around the turn of the century onwards, see Raymond F. Betts, Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, New York, Columbia U.P., 1961; and Roberts, op.cit., passim throughout Chapters I-III.
2. Other action which could be taken by France alone was seen to be (a) the general extension of French trade and investment throughout China, with creation of new consular posts in all of the major cities to pave the way (see, for example, fasc.IV, pp.12-13); (b) creation of new steamship lines centred on Shanghai (see fasc.V, pp.28-29); (c) use of the missionaries as intermediaries in trading negotiations (see fasc.II, pp.21-23); (d) educational work (see *ibid.*, pp.25-36).
3. See fasc.I, p.3.

The aim would be to establish branches all over China, especially in the ports. Once established, it should seek to amalgamate with other banks, such as the Banque Russo-Chinoise and eventually become the centre for "toutes les grosses affaires financières des Chinois", using its strength to impose monetary reform and ultimately the setting-up of a properly organised Treasury to centralise the finances of China as a whole.¹ At the end of this chapter he subsequently penned in the remark: "Tout ceci à rattacher à une grande idée de Conférences Internationales sur les choses chinoises et de révision des traités qu'il y aurait à développer".²

International co-operation would also be required to solve the problems of transport and communications throughout the country, in order to transform it from "une masse cellulaire" into "un corps organique".³ Since 1895, he conceded, there had been efforts to carry out public works, but these had been accomplished "avec beaucoup de mauvaise volonté" on the part of the Chinese, in a slow, anarchical way, at scattered points depending on the will of the individual Chinese officials and the influence of particular foreign Powers.⁴ The answer, as he constantly reiterated, was a joint programme of public works which would open up the country to easier circulation and make it into a unified whole. The organisation of

1. *ibid.*, p.4. See also, fasc.VI, pp.28-30 on the need for an international commission to achieve monetary reform and reorganise the finances of the whole Chinese Empire. Claudel's report/article on "Le Régime monétaire d'un petit port chinois" leads to the same conclusions (see CPC IV, pp.143-144).

2. fasc.I, p.5.

3. fasc.VII, p.8.

4. fasc.V, p.26.

this major project was described at one point with the words:

Le projet des travaux publics sera basé sur les ressources qui le garantissent et réparti entre les puissances (c'est là l'idée directrice, quant à la pratique elle est à déterminer). Il faut créer des organes à la Chine pour l'organiser: ce seront de grandes commissions internationales qui feront échapper la construction des voies de communications à l'arbitraire administratif chinois et créer la maison de commerce "Europe and Co." en Chine. L'action internationale s'exercera sous forme d'une société financière.¹

Far-reaching administrative reforms were also needed: reorganisation of the civil service to make it more efficient and bring it into closer contact with the local needs of the provinces by surrounding the Viceroy with councils of notables from the particular regions concerned;² creation of a national police force, "sous la garantie collective des Puissances," on land and sea to repress banditry, piracy and riots;³ regularisation and moderation of taxes;⁴ elimination of the likins and other forms of internal customs barriers (to be achieved by a generalised application of the

1. fasc.VI, p.31. See also, for example, fasc.IV, p.11; fasc.I, pp.30-31.

2. See fasc.I, pp.28-29: Claudel also wanted to see European administrative advisers placed alongside the Chinese authorities in every province (see fasc.VI, p.26).

3. fasc.I, p.29: the idea of an army or navy was rejected as useless, costly and too dangerous for the time being, however.

4. See *ibid.*, pp.29-30.

provisions of the Mackay Treaty).¹

At this stage Claudel was not entirely certain of how the projects should be launched, given the existing rivalry between the Powers. In general terms he believed that concerted action was required to curtail the influence of Japan whose policies he viewed as being orientated by economic and strategic imperatives towards the further destruction of China.² For the present France might start off by working either with Germany or with Britain.³ But whatever the case, the long-term goal was to initiate a coherent approach which would prevent China from disintegrating further or

1. See *ibid.*, p.30; also, for example, fasc.VI, pp.26-27. The Mackay Treaty signed by Britain and China in 1902 (similar treaties signed by Germany and by Japan) had been intended as part of the commercial settlement following the Boxers' rebellion, but was never put into effect since it would have required all of the other imperialist Powers to sign similar agreements and this proved impossible. Its main clauses envisaged (a) all Powers entering into the same engagements without making their assent conditional upon particular political or commercial concessions to each; (b) creation of a uniform Chinese coinage; (c) abolition of likins in return for higher duties on foreign imports; (e) reform of the Chinese judicial system in return for the abandonment of extra-territorial rights by Britain et al. See Hosea B. Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, Vol.III, pp.368-378.
2. See fasc.VI in its entirety. At the end of the chapter Claudel later added in pen: "Tout ce chapitre serait à remanier profondément aujourd'hui en s'inspirant des événements de ces 3 dernières années. Les idées directrices restent d'ailleurs les mêmes. Prendre comme base d'action le traité Mackay". (*ibid.*, p.31).
3. See fasc.I, pp.24-25. Claudel did not show any particular preference here, though in fasc.VI, p.14, he had emphasised that Britain should take the initiative in reforms and resistance to Japan. However, a set of undated handwritten notes by Berthelot (in ASPC) record that Claudel believed France could not count on Britain's help (since the latter wanted to use Japan to oust German economic influence in the Yangtse basin) and would therefore be well advised to seek an entente with Germany first.

falling under the control of any one Power. Moreover, he believed that the outcome of the Russo-Japanese war would greatly facilitate the possibilities of organising in this way:

En résumé, ce qui ressort de la situation politique, c'est que les traités de la politique se sont extrêmement simplifiés depuis 95; on n'assiste plus à un concert des Puissances qui ne savent plus ce qu'elles veulent; une puissance est écartée, l'autre Japonaise se contentera longtemps de la très grosse part obtenue. Les autres garderont vastes champs à l'activité financière de leurs nationaux et s'entendront pour que l'exercice n'en soit pas menacé. Pour cela empêcher tout danger extérieur ou intérieur¹ qui menacerait la solidité et l'intégrité de l'Empire.

At the end of the chapter of general conclusions from which the above quotation is drawn, Claudel had again added a handwritten comment to the effect that the means to initiating the necessary programme was to organise an international conference, and to have all the Powers sign agreements with China along similar lines to the Mackay Treaty.²

Such, in brief, was Claudel's programme of reforms. This short summary has necessarily omitted much of the detail, but the broad outline emerges clearly enough. The programme was based on lucid, eminently rational arguments stemming from the belief that the long-term interest of France and all of the other parties to the Chinese imbroglio (with the exception of Japan) would be served by a partial sacrifice of

1. fasc.I, p.26.

2. See *ibid.*, p.31.

their freedom of manoeuvre in order to collaborate for the purpose of replacing anarchy by coherent organisation. He assumed that if trade and investment were to expand, stable conditions and security were needed in China: the barriers - physical, economic and political - to circulation of goods and capital must be progressively removed. He showed an eye for the grand design, but he was pragmatic on the question of how the first steps might be taken towards achieving it. We shall see the reflection of the same manner of reasoning in his later writings on a variety of international issues. However, before leaving the question of China, it remains to add some brief remarks on the final version of the book.

In the first draft, Claudel's programme had not been concerned with abstract questions of ideology or moral principle, but with concrete solutions to a practical problem. In 1905 he had considered that the time was favourable for movement towards these solutions, because the diplomatic situation was simplified by the removal of Russia and by the fact that Japan would be absorbed for a time in digesting her recent gains. As we have seen, he still believed in the desirability of these reforms at the time when he added the marginal notes in 1908 or 1909. However, he was aware that the balance of power had changed since 1905, and that Russia, as well as Japan, was again a force to be reckoned with.¹ By the time he wrote the third draft in 1910 he seems to have resigned himself to the idea that there was no longer any serious possibility of the type of changes for which

1. See fasc.I, p.26 and fasc.VI, p.12, where the comment, "ce n'est déjà plus vrai", is added opposite remarks on Russia's eclipse.

he had hoped. In his chapter on "La Position actuelle des Puissances" he classified the Powers into two categories - those which had an interest in saving China, and those which did not:

Dans le premier groupe je placerais les Puissances que j'appellerais le Conseil de famille du Vieillard Jaune et qui, sans cesse attentives à sa succession future, cherchent, au mieux de leurs intérêts et même de ceux de leur malade, à lui vendre la sagesse, à lui inspirer quelques désirs d'amendement et d'hygiène politiques, à devenir à la fois ses mentors et ses fournisseurs. D'autre part les Puissances qui n'ont aucun intérêt à voir le malade guérir et qui sont désignées par la nature et par les faits comme prétendant à une part plus ou moins large de ses possessions:(...).

The Powers which he placed in the first category - Britain, France, Germany and the United States - were those whose individual positions he went on to describe in somewhat scathing or dismissive terms, either because (as in the case of Britain and France) they had wasted their opportunities, or (as in the case of Germany and the USA) he did not anticipate that they would play a particularly significant role in the future.² On the other hand, the two Powers - Russia and Japan - whose geographical positions placed them in an organic relationship with China, and whose vital interest it was to absorb parts of their neighbour, were those which he foresaw taking immense steps forward in the future. Indeed, although Claudel predicted sourly that Japan's insensitivity to her Chinese subjects might later cost her dear,³ he showed a considerable admiration for Russia's "politique

1. OC IV, pp.128-129.

2. See *ibid.*, pp.129-135.

3. See *ibid.*, p.140, where Claudel remarks that Japan's "procédés violents et vexatoires" have cost her the prestige which she had gained in Chinese eyes by defeating Russia in 1905.

vivante et vitale".¹ She might have been temporarily halted by the Japanese in 1904-1905, but her designs had been "légitimes et bien conçus"², and her subsequent thrust to regain and consolidate de facto control over vast tracts of Manchuria "valait les sacrifices qu'elle a coûtés".³ Be that as it may, the fact is that Claudel perceived the balance of power as having shifted considerably since 1905 and he must surely have assumed that for the time being at least his past hopes were a dead letter. It was appropriate that he should have ended his book with the words CAETERA DESIDERANTUR.⁴

1. *ibid.*, p.135.

2. *ibid.*, p.136.

3. *ibid.*, p.137.

4. *ibid.*, p.140.

CHAPTER III. The Patriot

A. France and Germany: the Problem of National Security

Claudé took up his first German posting in late September 1911 at a moment when diplomatic contact between France and her eastern neighbour was particularly strained as a result of the Agadir crisis. By the time he relinquished his second posting on 4 August 1914 subsequent events on the European continent had carried long-standing international rivalries beyond breaking-point, and the opposing systems of alliances to which France and Germany belonged had reached the point of war. Yet, although his three years in Germany could scarcely have coincided with a less propitious period in the history of peace-time relations between the two countries, Claudé did not find his stay markedly disagreeable, nor did he share the venomous hatred of the Germans which increasingly gripped the French Right at that time.

Admittedly, he had at first seen it as ironical that he, of all people, should represent France in Frankfurt, "cette capitale de la juiverie".¹ From a letter which he wrote to his brother-in-law's wife on 17 October 1911 it is also clear that he had not particularly relished the prospect of close contact with the German people themselves.² One evident reason for this was his natural fear that he would encounter hostility in a country which was France's past enemy and present rival. But we might equally imagine that his

1. Jo. I, p.205, (30 Sept. 1911).

2. See letter to Elizabeth Sainte-Marie-Perrin, 17 Oct. 1911, ASPC.

wariness would not have been unrelated to the fact that Germany was the home of Protestantism, and of a culture which had sired philosophers such as Kant and Nietzsche, whom he had denounced in the past among the sowers of intellectual evil.¹ However, the same letter indicates that his early weeks in Frankfurt had made him feel the Germans were less hostile and generally less unpleasant than he had expected. Moreover, he was impressed by their disciplined, authoritarian society:

Ici, où les rapports avec la France sont nombreux, il n'y a pas d'hostilité contre nous et personne ne songe à la guerre. Dans toute l'Allemagne le sentiment général à notre égard est celui d'un mépris bienveillant. Ce pays me fait beaucoup moins mauvaise impression que j'aurais cru. On sent partout une autorité sévère, juste, compétente et respectée. On y bavarde moins qu'en France et en Autriche. Nulle part on ne voit de langueur ou de paresse. Tout le monde a l'air d'avoir goût à l'existence.²

On 3 December he wrote to André Suarès that he had no regrets at having been transferred from Prague to Frankfurt. Prague had merely been a "silo à betteraves", where the great palaces built by "les vainqueurs de la Montagne-Blanche, berceau de la dernière féodalité qu'ait connue l'Europe" had now been deserted or replaced by the most hideous buildings, since liberty (by which he presumably meant the erosion of Austrian political and cultural domination) had predictably driven out all trace of art or poetry.³

1. For references to Nietzsche, see, for example, letter to Gide, 7 Aug. 1903, Corres. PC-AG, p.47; Jo. I, p.5, (Nov. 1904); for Kant, see, for example, letter to Frizeau, 20 Jan. 1904, Corres. PC-FJ/GF, p.33; letter to Gide, 25 Dec. 1906, Corres. PC-AG, p.69.

2. Letter to Elizabeth Sainte-Marie-Perrin, 17 Oct. 1911, ASPC.

3. In Corres. PC-AS, p.144.

Compared with the Czechs, he found the Germans positively refined, and had discovered that they were "assez sympathiques, fort polis d'ailleurs envers les Français et presque déférents".¹

The same attitude of rather patronising friendliness was to be reflected in another letter to Suarès some months later, when he described the Germans as "une race assez bonasse qui dans le fond ont gardé l'éblouissement et l'admiration de la France".² Although Claudel's diary for May of that year contains a jibe to the effect that Germany was architecturally, politically, culturally and linguistically a sausage "bourrée de choses disparates", personal contact was obviously not making for the type of blind hatred felt by so many of his compatriots, whose emotions were fed by nationalistic rhetoric and stereotyped caricatures of the Prussian.³ What is more, Claudel found a number of literary admirers eager to read, translate and even stage his works in Germany.⁴ He was thus further encouraged to regard himself as the bearer of a truly universal Catholicism which

1. *id.*

2. Letter to Suarès, 11 April 1912, *ibid.*, p. 173.

3. See Jo. I, p.223, (May 1912).

4. For discussion of the translations, staging and critical response to his works during this period, see Margret Andersen, Claudel et l'Allemagne, CCC III, Ottawa, Éds. de l'Univ. d'Ottawa, 1965, pp. 49-76, 92-96, 181-189.

extended its message above and beyond national frontiers.

It was in this spirit that he viewed the question of how his play, L'Annonce faite à Marie, should be translated. The French version of the drama had been written in 1910-1911. Set in the late Middle Ages, it was a work of profoundly patriotic colouring, in the sense that it had linked the theme of vicarious suffering embodied by the central figure, Violaine, with the theme of national reunification accomplished through the sacrifice of Jeanne d'Arc (whose importance as a patriotic-religious symbol for French Catholics had been demonstrated so amply by the enthusiasm which had greeted her beatification in 1909). However, these themes had been linked in their turn with the wider reunification of the Catholic world through the ending of the Great Schism: hence, the words of Violaine's father in the final act:

Ma femme aussi/Est morte, ma fille est morte,
la sainte Pucelle/A été brûlée et jetée au vent,
pas un de ses os ne reste à la terre./Mais le Roi
et le Pontife de nouveau sont rendus à la France
et à l'Univers./Le schisme prend fin, de nouveau
s'élève au-dessus de tous les hommes le Trône./
J'ai repassé par Rome, j'ai baisé le pied de
Saint Pierre, j'ai mangé debout le pain béni
avec le peuple des Quatre Parties de la Terre,/
Tandis que les cloches du Quirinal et du Latran et
la voix de Sainte-Marie-Majeur/Saluaient les
ambassadeurs de ces peuples nouveaux qui du Levant
et du Couchant pénètrent à la fois dans la Ville;/
L'Asie retrouvée et ce monde Atlantique au-delà
des Colonnes d'Hercule!¹

1. Th. II, p.105. For a concise discussion of the linking of Violaine, Jeanne and the ending of the Schism, considered within the wider context of Claudel's utilisation of the theme of vicarious suffering in his plays, see Griffiths, The Reactionary Revolution, pp. 202-205. For reference to the beatification of Jeanne d'Arc and its reception by the French Right, see Weber, The Nationalist Revival, p.71.

When the play was translated, Claudel was prepared to have the translator remove all specifically French colour, such as names of people or places. A letter which he sent to Miloš Marten on 28 January 1913 (in which he again remarked on how much he was enjoying his time in Germany) explained his reasons for allowing these changes, and his willingness to permit similar modifications if the play were translated into Czech:

Je suis 'Catholique' avant d'être nationaliste.
Si des noms propres et quelques tournures de langage
empêchent mon drame de trouver le chemin des coeurs
et cet Angelus dans le ciel qui sans aucune langue
sonne au-dessus des nations pour le salut de tous
les hommes, je suis disposé à les sacrifier gaiement,
pour que nul ne trouve étrangers ces accents que le
convient à la seule patrie! ¹

However, while Claudel's favourable experience in Germany was helping to plant further seeds of the curious internationalism which he was to profess later in his life, it did not blind him to the awesome threat which German military strength posed for France. On the contrary, because he was in a position to keep himself particularly well informed of the build-up of German troops and armaments, he was extremely anxious to see France strengthen her own military potential.

As international tension continued to mount in Europe, the year 1911 had brought the first suggestions in France that a return to three-year military service would help to counter the danger to national security. The campaign gathered momentum in

1. In CPC IX, p.154. In the German translation the setting was Germany in the 11th century and the play revolved around purely fictional events (see Andersen, op. cit., p.95).

the right-wing press throughout 1912 and reached its height in the early months of 1913, against strenuous opposition from the Socialists and many Radicals, until the law was passed in August of that year.¹ In April and May 1913, when the controversy was at its fiercest, Claudel sent three articles from his vantage-point in Germany to convince the readers of the Journal de Clichy that an extension of military service was absolutely essential.

Predictably enough, part of the content of the articles was devoted to venomous attacks on the enemies of the bill. Claudel had already shown in the past that although he might be developing a wider, less chauvinistic view of the world than the spokesmen of the nationalist Right, he was at one with Barrès, Maurras and the rest in his animosity towards those who could be considered anti-patriotic or inimical to the strength of the nation. Thus, one of his principal grievances against the Dreyfusists was that by undermining legitimate authority they had caused France to be humiliated in the eyes of the world: "on n'a jamais le droit de faire du mal à sa mère", he had declared in 1910 when castigating Péguy and the other intellectuals who had supported the revisionist cause.²

1. For a detailed discussion of the whole debate, see Weber, The Nationalist Revival, pp.110-144.

2. Letter to Péguy, 10 Aug. 1910, in Antoine, "Péguy et Claudel", p.29.

Now, in 1913, his polemic was all the more heated because the question at issue was no longer national prestige, but physical survival. His condemnation of the Radicals may be summarised in his own words: "Je suis radical et, par conséquent, rien de ce qui est antifrançais ne m'est étranger".¹ He thanked God for the passing of the Combist era, "où les André et les Pelletan, où ce directoire d'incapables, de traîtres et de bandits mit la France, avec des arsenaux vides et une armée désorganisée, à la merci de la Prusse".² As for the Socialists, they were grouped together with their "alliés dreyfusards et intellectuels" under the title of "Prussiens de l'intérieur", their avowed anti-militarism and their ideology of proletarian internationalism making them natural targets for accusations of treachery.³

The arguments which Claudel put forward to justify the extension of military service covered a wide spectrum of considerations. They ranged over observations concerning Germany's current military superiority and the economic factors

1. "Pourquoi la Loi de trois ans est nécessaire", (1), (19 April 1913),Chroniques, p.56.

2. "Pourquoi la Loi de trois ans (1), *ibid.*, p.55.

3. "Les Prussiens de l'intérieur,(31 May 1913),*ibid.*, p.64.

pushing her towards war; questions of strategy and the likelihood of a surprise attack across the eastern frontier or through Belgium;¹ doubts as to Britain's willingness or Russia's ability to intervene decisively;² and the depressing forecast that if Germany did win a resounding victory, France would suffer the fate of any conquered nation, "saignée à blanc, traitée en pays vassal et en colonie d'exploitation".³

It was an extremely menacing picture and, in view of the purpose for which the articles were intended, it concentrated entirely on the most negative aspects of France's situation. Nevertheless, there was no suggestion of bellicose revanchisme or vilification of the Germans themselves. He was merely offering a set of informed speculations couched in terms of a political realism which assumed that each country on the international stage tended to act pragmatically in accordance with the immediate dictates of self-interest. Little over a year later, however, with the coming of total war, this rational approach was to be suspended, and the fervent antagonism which Claudel had previously shown towards his enemies within France would be turned outwards in jingoistic hatred of the invader.

1. See "Pourquoi la loi de trois ans , (1) , *ibid.* , pp.54-55.

2. See "Pourquoi la loi de trois ans ...", (2) , (26 April 1913)*ibid.* , pp.56-58.

3. "Les Prussiens de l'intérieur", *ibid.* , p.65.

B. The Coming of War

In Hamburg on 26 July 1914, the day after Serbia had rejected the Austrian ultimatum, Claudel was struck by the sight of a large white poster in a tobacconist's shop. On the poster was the word "KRIEG!!!"¹. Evoking the atmosphere of intense excitement reigning in the city, and evidently anticipating that war would soon engulf the whole of Europe, Claudel greeted the prospect with a surge of poetic enthusiasm. As yet, there was no sign of hatred for the future enemy. In his elation, he pictured the war as an immense adventure: not so much a destructive conflict between nations as a savage embrace bringing the peoples of Europe together. His diary for that day contained the notes for a projected ode on these themes:

Ode de la guerre: On étouffait, on était enfermé, on crevait dans ce bain grouillant les uns contre les autres, (....). Tout-à-coup un coup de vent, les chapeaux (canotiers, juillet) qui s'envolent, les journaux, la risée comme le vent mêlé d'une grande pluie sur l'eau d'un lac, la foule qui se met à chanter. Délivré du métier, de la femme, des enfants, du lieu stipulé, l'aventure. A la même heure dans toutes les grandes villes d'Europe, Hambourg, Berlin, Paris, Vienne, Belgrade, S.-Pétersbourg. Le tiers de la mer transformé en sang (Apoc.).

Images: le courant d'air par la porte qui s'ouvre, la guerre qui introduit sa tête et ses épaules et qui d'un coup de reins arrache, déracine toute la porte avec ses tours, la brèche. Hourra! Le canon trempé dans son bain d'huile et la grande flamme. Une fois de plus tous les peuples vont s'étreindre et se retrouver, se sentir dans les bras l'un de l'autre, se reconnaître. Inlassablement, une fois de plus à ta tâche, vieille Europe!²

1. See Jo. I, p.292. Claudel describes it as "le beau mot de délivrance et d'aventure".

2. ibid., pp.292-293. The poem was never to be written.

However, the following weeks were to give him an initial insight into the less romantic side of the situation. Before his departure from Germany, he was to observe the trains full of soldiers being hailed by the crowd, but he was also to see the port "avec tous ces bateaux morts, épaves flottantes"¹ and "les premières larmes. Les premières figures rouges et pleurantes"². When he left Hamburg on 3 August, it was "sous les huées, les crachats et les projectiles de la foule"³. The harrowing, circuitous return journey to France took nearly a fortnight and was rapidly followed by further upheavals: the need to make his mother leave her home in the path of the German advance, scenes of panic at the Ministry, frightening rumours concerning the likely fate of Paris, and finally the move to Bordeaux in the wake of the Government⁴.

There were to be many more days of anguish before the end of the war. Nevertheless, Claudel was to be among those whose age or duties kept them from direct experience of the fighting. His own contribution to the French war effort was in continuing to serve the Ministry. Based in France (except during a short visit to Italy) from the late summer of 1914 to October 1915, he was primarily involved with work for the Service des prisonniers de guerre, and with the organisation of propaganda intended to win over Catholic opinion in

1. *ibid.*, p.294, (2 Aug. 1914).

2. *ibid.*, p.295, (2 Aug. 1914).

3. *ibid.*, p.295, (events of several days summarised later, on 19 Aug. 1914).

4. *ibid.*, pp.295-298, (Aug. - Sept. 1914).

neutral countries. Based in Italy throughout most of the following year, he was mainly engaged in researching the possibilities of closer Franco-Italian commercial links, and in drawing up a project for the putative construction of a direct railway line across Europe from Bordeaux to Odessa. Finally, after his posting as ministre plénipotentiaire to Brazil in the early months of 1917, his work included propaganda activity aimed at helping to influence Brazilian opinion in favour of entry into the war; negotiating the cession to France of some thirty German merchant ships which had been impounded by the Brazilian authorities; and purchasing large quantities of badly needed food products for his country. Although the latter negotiations became the subject of a nasty politico-financial scandal at one point, they later earned him the congratulations of his minister and Clemenceau¹.

Claudé's professional activities were no doubt of very real value to his country, but the fact that they kept him at a distance from the carnage was naturally reflected in his writings. Though far from indifferent to the sufferings of the soldiers, he nevertheless saw the war through the eyes of the arrière, where it was easier to view the issues at stake in more abstract, schematic terms than at the front. His thinking remained coloured to some extent by romantic preconceptions: his attitudes often appeared oversimplified and excessive, influenced as they were by hearsay, by his partisan imagination and, above all, by his desire to fit the war into an overall scheme of religious interpretation.

1. For a more detailed summary of Claudé's activities, see Jean-Claude Berton, "De Prague à Copenhague", in CPC IV, pp.149-160.

C. The Enemy

Among Claudel's personal archives can be found the text of a propaganda pamphlet, "La Guerre et la foi", which he wrote at some time during the winter of 1914-1915 as part of the covert campaign to win over Catholic opinion in the neutral countries¹. It naturally set out the issues at stake in the most unequivocal terms, portraying the war as a struggle against "la barbarie matérialiste, contre une sorte de religion de la force dégradante et menaçante qui est celui de l'Allemagne"². The clear implication of the pamphlet was that the Germans were systematically waging war on Catholicism. His accusations proceeded by matching words of the Germans with their

1. There are two copies in ASPC, Dossier Francisque Gay: a manuscript (16 pages) and a typescript (5 pages). Page numbers given in this chapter refer to the typescript. Claudel had started working on propaganda in November 1914: see Jo. I, p.300: "Je suis chargé de faire de petits tracts pour répondre à la propagande allemande dans les pays neutres". See also undated draft for a "Circulaire aux agents diplomatiques" (ASPC, File P VIII, "Contacts et circonstances: Prague, Autriche, Brésil, Danemark") discussing the need to obtain wide distribution of propaganda pamphlets abroad, while concealing their origin. For a related aspect of Claudel's tasks for the Ministry, see letters from Mgr. Baudrillart to Francisque Gay (5, 17, 18, 22 Feb., 26 March, 22 April 1915, Dossier Gay). As part of the effort to win over Catholic opinion abroad, Claudel approached Baudrillart, whom he asked to organise the writing and publication of a propaganda work. This set in train a long series of negotiations (including a successful quest for permission from the Pope) which led to the production of a double volume (unofficially subsidised by the Ministry) under the auspices of Baudrillart's newly formed Comité catholique de propagande française à l'étranger. It was published under the title La Guerre allemande et le catholicisme, (Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1915) and was translated into several languages. Claudel did not contribute to the contents of the book but oversaw its production.
2. "La Guerre et la foi", p.5.

horrific actions. Thus, he noted the Kaiser's frequent invocations of God in his speeches, and, of course, the motto Gott mit uns¹. He then confronted them with details of atrocities, especially those directed against the Church. The reader's attention was drawn to the calculated destruction or desecration of Catholic monasteries, convents, churches, hospitals or institutions of learning in Belgium, Poland and France. These acts of brutal sacrilege - at Louvain, for instance - had been accompanied by appalling massacres or eviction of large numbers of priests and monks². Reims Cathedral, the cradle of French Christianity, had been mercilessly shelled by the invaders, and its destruction greeted in Germany with a wave of enthusiasm:

La destruction de la Cathédrale de Reims a été accueillie dans toute l'Allemagne par un cri d'allégresse. Le principal journal de Berlin a publié à ce sujet une poésie qui contient ce couplet:

'Les cloches ne sonnent plus
 Dans la cathédrale à deux tours
 Finie la bénédiction!
 Nous avons fermé avec du plomb
 O Reims, ta maison d'idolâtrie.'³

Although this pamphlet was intended as propaganda for foreign consumption, the image of the Germans which it put forward was a faithful reflection of the type of views commonly held by French Catholics at that time. Not only were Belgium and France invariably seen as the innocent victims of savage aggression, but it was

1. See *ibid.*, p.1.

2. See *ibid.*, pp.1-3. The text was to be accompanied by photographic evidence, showing the destruction of buildings, a cross sawn in half, the burned body of a woman, etc.

3. *ibid.*, p.2.

particularly important for French Catholics to believe that God could not be on Germany's side as the Germans themselves claimed. Indeed, the shelling of Reims Cathedral in September 1914 had been widely taken to symbolise the fundamentally barbaric and sacrilegious nature of the German offensive. Mgr. Baudrillart was but one voice among a multitude when he denounced "le génie du mal que l'Allemand porte en lui", and anticipated that the punishment awaiting the barbarian would be all the more terrible because "il aura tenté, dérisoire entreprise, de rendre aux yeux des hommes, Dieu lui-même complice de ses sacrilèges forfaits"¹. Moreover, it was widely believed that Germany's temporal barbarism was the natural counterpart of an obnoxious culture which - with its crude amalgam of pagan mythology, Lutheran heresy, philosophical subjectivism, pseudo-science and other vile adjuncts - was essentially anti-Catholic as well as anti-French².

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1. Mgr. A. Baudrillart, L'Ame de la France à Reims, (text of sermon on 30 Sept. 1914), Paris, Beauchesne, 1915. pp. 7, 24. For variations on the themes of barbarism, sacrilege, or particular horror at the shelling of Reims Cathedral, see, for example, Cardinal Mercier, Patriotisme et endurance, Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1914, pp.5-6, 13-16; P. Imbart de la Tour, L'Opinion catholique et la guerre, Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1915; Mgr. Luçon, letter to Philippe d'Orléans, 30 Oct. 1914, in L'Action française, 29 Nov. 1914 (reprinted in Jacques Bainville (ed.), La Presse et la guerre. "L'Action française", Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1915, pp.61-63); Julien de Narfon, "La Journée de prières nationales" (report of sermons and services at Sacré-Coeur), Le Figaro, 14 Dec. 1914, (reprinted in J. de Narfon (ed.), La Presse et la guerre. "Le Figaro", Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1915, pp.72-77); Léon Bloy, letters to Émile Baumann (20 Aug. 1914), Jean de la Laurencie (21 Aug. 1914), Félix Raugel (30 June 1915), in Bloy, Au seuil de l'Apocalypse, Oeuvres complètes, Vol. XVIII, Paris, François Bernouard, 1948, pp.2161-2162, 2163, 2305-2308.
 2. See, for example, Mgr. A. Pons, L'Ame française et la guerre, Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1915, pp.128-145; Victor Giraud, Pro Patria, Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1915, pp.45-50; Abbé Paquier, Luther, Kant, Nietzsche, Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1915.

However, two questions need to be asked here. Firstly, did Claudel's pamphlet accurately mirror his own view of the enemy during the early stages of the war? Secondly, if that was the case, did his perception change at all as the conflict continued? His published writings, his diaries and his correspondence tended, in fact, to concentrate less on denouncing the evils of the enemy than on expressing his conception of his own country's role in the war. Nevertheless, it will be seen that the answer to the first question was undoubtedly affirmative. Moreover, two long poems written during the last months of fighting and the first months after the armistice suggest that his thinking had not fundamentally altered by the end of the war.

Once battle had been joined, patriotic feeling appears to have swept away all memory of the relative goodwill that he had felt towards the Germans before the war. As he told Darius Milhaud in October 1914, France was now faced with "l'invasion la plus dégoûtante qui l'ait jamais menacée. Les Allemands ont l'ignominie, l'impersonnalité, le nombre et la férocité de la vermine"¹. Or, as he wrote to his Italian friend Piero Jahier in January 1915, the French were standing firm in the knowledge that they were fighting "contre la tyrannie, la barbarie la plus infâme, contre le matérialisme le plus abject et le plus grossier, contre le peuple le plus brutal et le plus stupide qui ait jamais existé"². Furthermore, as his tract suggested, the physical assault by the Germans was linked in Claudel's mind with the

1. Letter to Milhaud, 30 Oct. 1914, in CPC III, p.45.

2. Letter to Jahier, 30 Jan. 1915, in Giordan, op. cit., Claudel en Italie p.115.

idea of an underlying attack on Catholicism by the representatives of the Lutheran heresy. It was in this light that he had written to Francis Jammes on 24 September 1914, referring to the recent battle of the Marne and the bombardment of Reims:

Et cette cathédrale comme un drapeau, comme une
vieille mère au milieu de ses enfants que bombardent ces
fils de Luther, toutes les hordes de la sombre
Germanie! N.-S. ne laissera pas sans vengeance cette
injure faite à sa mère. Les protestants détestent
tellement la Sainte Vierge!¹

This conviction provided much of the inspiration for La Nuit de Noël 1914, a jingoistic one-act play which he completed in February 1915. It shows the souls of two dead soldiers, a priest, and a group of children "que le cruel Hérode a immolés"² looking down on the battlefields around Reims, and on the cathedral itself "assassinée par les Allemands en haine de la foi"³. Thus, in the words of one of the dead soldiers, France is not merely called to defend her soil against the invader, but to combat "contre leur Goethe et leur Kant et leur Nietzsche et tous ces souffleurs de ténèbres dont le nom même fait horreur/Et contre leur père à tous, Martin Luther qui est avec le diable"⁴. Furthermore, through the imagery of his war poetry in 1915 the idea of spiritual evil could be extended to suggest that Germany was an agent of eternal wickedness.

1. In Corres. PC-FJ/GF, pp.274-275.

2. Th. II, p.576.

3. ibid., p.580.

4. ibid., p.589.

Apostrophised in "Derrière eux" (June) as a nation "qui est parmi les autres nations comme Caïn"¹, the Germans appeared to be identified in "Si pourtant" (November) with the Devil himself and the timeless forces of Darkness:

La France dans son ennemi plus abominable que la mort pousse de toutes parts et serre/C'est la vieille lutte une fois de plus sans merci, c'est Mahomet sur nous une fois de plus avec Luther!/Je reconnais l'haleine empestée et ce coeur dans le sein monstrueux qui forge!/Et c'est vrai qu'il n'a pas le dessus, mais nous n'arriverons jamais à lui trouver le noeud de la gorge!/Son nom lui sort peu à peu, c'est lui, nul ne s'y trompe cette fois:/Est-ce qu'il y a moyen de lâcher prise quand c'est tout l'Enfer que l'on tient entre ses doigts?/Le dégoût est plus grand que le danger, l'Ennemi non seulement à soutenir mais à comprendre!²

Nearly three years later the same images were present when Claudel was writing "Sainte Geneviève" during Ludendorff's final offensive in the spring of 1918, for the Germans were described as "les hordes de Satan, précédées de la puanteur et de l'asphyxie,/ Celle des gaz que l'on met en bouteilles et celle-là qu'on replie dans les livres, Luther, et le grand âne solennel Goethe, avec Kant et sa philosophie"³. More interesting, however, was his elaboration of the notion of an eternal destiny of evil in "Saint Martin" during the months after the armistice. According to the deterministic vision in this work, Germany appears fated to accomplish a disruptive function in the world throughout time. In

1. Po., p.537.

2. ibid., p.557-558.

3. ibid., p.642. The poem had been started in 1916, it seems, but as Jacques Petit has shown, most of the work was not written until April - June 1918 (see ibid., pp.1138-1142 for details).

this perspective the most fundamental trait of the German national character is intense greed, as evidenced by the frenzied pursuit of industrial wealth, and as symbolised by the national obsession with the Rheingold legend:

Race de forgerons et de mineurs et de
fabricateurs dans l'ombre des bois et de la fumée!/
Scruteurs de toutes les archives à cause de ce
secret qui peut-être y est enfermé,/L'or sous le
Rhin, le talisman tout à l'heure qui va te donner la
possession de l'univers,/La formule qui permet d'avoir
à soi ce qui est à Dieu et qui est tombé du Ciel avec
Lucifer ¹.

Germany is seen as constantly reaching out to grasp the unattainable in a "grossier désir d'être Dieu"². This desperate quest is also linked with the significance of her central, enclosed position in the European land mass. Because of her predatory, innately unstable character, Germany has always striven to dominate the whole continent on the basis of what she assumes to be a privileged focal position. So, Claudel sketches the picture of a seething, heterogeneous mass at the heart of Europe, a "grand tas confus de tripes et d'entrailles"³, an amalgam of "peuples mal avalés"⁴, a nation which refuses to accept its natural limits and imperils the equilibrium of the continent by its urge for expansion. Yet, the poet declares, this striving outwards

1. *ibid.*, p.672. The poem was written between Nov. 1918 and Sept. 1919.

2. *ibid.*, p.671.

3. *id.*

4. *ibid.*, p.672.

will always be halted:

Le Rhin qu'on ^{t'a}mis à travers toi est-il si peu
profond qu'à jamais tu pouvais en éloigner ton cœur
et ton oreille et tes yeux?/Écoute ce que dit de sa
source le fleuve à travers toi qui passe et ce récit
qui t'est antérieur:/Une vraie rive, tu ne pourras pas
l'atteindre, ô peuple à jamais intérieur!¹

Moreover, the poem also contained the suggestion that Germany's
most recent attempt at revolt against her natural confines had been
foreseen and permitted by Providence for the fulfilment of God's
higher purpose and the manifestation of His strength:

Rien ne fut omis, c'est bien. Ce qui dépendait
de toi tu l'as fait en conscience:/L'heure est venue,
en avant! Ce qui t'attend, tu le sais d'avance./C'est
l'enthousiasme de la mort qui t'a pris, comme d'autres
l'espérance! (....)/C'est cela qui est construit pour
obliger Dieu à être le plus fort².

It would be easy to dismiss these lines, and those quoted
earlier from the same poem, as no more than a bizarre form of imagery
inspired by the knowledge that Germany had now been defeated.
However, while allowance must obviously be made for some degree of
poetic licence, it is certain that this was not entirely the case.

Firstly, Claudel was, in a sense, turning the arguments of the
extreme pan-germanists on their head. Quotations from Grabowsky,
Spahn, Stieve and Treitschke in his diary for July 1917 and June 1918

1. id.

2. *ibid.*, p.673.

show that he had some knowledge of their historicist theories on the subject of Germany's will to power and supposed destiny to world-domination¹. At the same time, Claudel was partly basing his reply on general ideas which he had held before the war. When he made his deterministic association between Germany's geographical position, the character of the German nation and its civilisation he was merely transposing into mystical, symbolic terms the principle which he had enounced in earlier years when deriving the characteristics of Chinese civilisation from its physical environment on the grounds that "un pays est une civilisation, un groupement social au service d'une direction géographique"².

Indeed, it is interesting to observe that when he had been reformulating the same principle in somewhat different terms in the second draft of Sous le signe, he had argued that every country had a particular form, or "suivant toute la force du mot, un sens", resulting less from the line of its frontiers than from the lie of the land which it occupied, and he had given the example of Germany, the "sens" (implying an idea of meaning as well as direction) of which was "celui de ses longues rivières qui l'inclinent vers le nord et l'est"³. Projected into the nightmarish vision in "Saint Martin", this notion could thus be extended to view the German nation as determined by physical geography (shapeless, "intérieur" and self-regarding, centred on the Rhine, hideously industrial because of her resources of

1. See Jo. I, pp.381-382, 407.

2. Sous le signe, first draft, fasc. II, p.1.

3. Pr., p.1046.

coal and iron), but at the same time in constant revolt against its natural confines.

Secondly, the idea that Germany's most recent revolt had been foreseen, and somehow necessary within the Providential scheme owed much to his reading of the Bible. Although he had not yet turned to the writing of exegetical works, he had long believed that the Scriptures could be interpreted in symbolic terms as the key to understanding the past and future history of mankind¹: hence the importance of the following reference in his diary for July 1918, four months before he began to write "Saint Martin":

Dans Ezéchiél XXXVIII-XXXIX: Prophétie de Gog et Magog qui semble si étrangement s'appliquer aux événements actuels: 22. Et judicabo eum peste et sanguine et imbre vehementi et lapidibus immensis; ignem et sulphur pluam super eum, et super exercitum ejus, et super populos multos qui sunt cum eo².

According to Ezekiel's prophecy, Gog would lead huge armies out of the North to despoil and pillage³. God, defending His chosen people would destroy the invader with fire and brimstone, and enormous hailstones. Moreover, Gog's challenge to God's authority was not a random occurrence: it was part of the divine scheme in that the attack was expected and allowed by God so that He could affirm His rule⁴.

1. See, for example, Claudel's remarks on the interpretation of Revelations in letter to Massignon, 6 Feb. 1912, Corres. PC-IM, pp.155-156.

2. Jo. I, p.409.

3. See Ezekiel XXXVIII, 1-16.

4. See Ezekiel XXXVIII, 23; XXXIX, 7-29.

At this stage, when Claudel wrote "Saint Martin" his application of both his mystico-geographical determinism and of the symbolic interpretation of Ezekiel's prophecy were perhaps not to be taken too literally. Nevertheless, his approach in this poem was significant because it was something which he was to develop further in later years in the light of his changing preoccupations, applying the same technique to other countries as well as Germany itself.

D: Sacrifice

In his propaganda tract, "La Guerre et la foi", Claudel's portrayal of his own country's role in the war had inevitably been a counterpart of his intention to imply that the Germans were waging war against the Catholic faith. As evidence that the Republic was no longer an enemy of the Church he could point to the presence of some 20,000 priests in the French army, presiding over the spiritual welfare of the soldiers and serving with exemplary gallantry in various capacities in the ranks. Furthermore, how could the miraculous survival of many churches, or, for example, the statue of Jeanne d'Arc among the ruins of Reims Cathedral, under heavy German bombardment be explained except by the fact that it was the will of Providence, for "les Français, non pas hypocrites et pharisiens, mais modestes et sincères, prient Dieu comme ils combattent l'ennemi. C'est-à-dire sans fanfaronnade, mais de toutes leurs forces"¹. Thus, the issues

1. "La Guerre et la foi", p.4.

were defined in absolute terms: France was defending "la civilisation chrétienne" against the forces of barbarism, blasphemy and sacrilege¹.

Here too, Claudel's pamphlet did no more than reflect beliefs which had been widely aired by members of the Church hierarchy and other leaders of Catholic opinion in France. Notwithstanding the neutralist, pacifist stance adopted by the Vatican, the vast majority of the French clergy and their flocks had rallied to the call for union sacrée and national defence¹. The Catholic press had given massive publicity to the loyalty with which priests and monks (including many who had returned from exile) had answered the call to the colours. More important still were the signs of a massive renewal of religious observance throughout the nation. Ecclesiastics and Catholic publicists had hailed, and attempted to encourage these symptoms of an apparent reversal of the process of dechristianisation. They could glory in the vast congregations attending mass at the front and, indeed, all over France. Cardinal Amette, Archbishop of Paris, was thus able to refer exultantly to an "admirable mouvement de foi religieuse qui soulève notre pays tout entier."³ It could be hoped that France was at last rediscovering her traditional vocation as eldest daughter of the Church and, hence, that the present

1. *ibid.*, p.5.

2. See Jean-Jacques Becker, 1914: Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre, Paris, Fondation nationale des Sciences politiques, 1977, pp.416-420, 452-468, for a well-documented discussion of the position adopted by the Church hierarchy and the Catholic press during the early months of the war. The Vatican's neutralist stance continued to be a difficulty throughout the war: see Dansette, Histoire religieuse, pp.707-710.

3. In La Semaine religieuse, 29 Aug. 1914, quoted in Becker, *op. cit.*, p.452.

spiritual renewal would pave the way for what Mgr. Baudrillart once described as "le contre-coup politique"¹ - the repeal of anticlerical legislation, the long-term reconciliation of Church and State.

The war could therefore be fitted into the framework of traditional Catholic beliefs concerning the expiatory value of suffering and sacrifice. On the one hand, it could be seen as a Providential punishment for the evils of the past - an expression of "les châtiments que nous avons trop conscience d'avoir mérités", as one Catholic editorialist put it in September 1914². By the same token, through the heroic endurance of her sacrifice and the slaughter of her soldiers, France was redeeming herself. This great hope might be summarised, for example, in the rhetoric of Mgr. A. Pons:

Per crucem ad lucem! A la gloire par la souffrance!

Catholiques de France, nous ferons notre patrie grande et libre, capable de continuer au monde les leçons de progrès et de Foi, digne de se présenter encore comme la fille aînée de l'Église et la nation civilisatrice par excellence que par le succès que mériteront la vaillance des combattants unie aux prières, à la conversion, et à l'endurance des non-combattants.

Per crucem ad lucem! A la gloire par la souffrance! ³

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1. In La Semaine religieuse, 22 Aug. 1914, quoted in Becker, op. cit., p.462.
 2. In La Semaine religieuse, 12 Sept. 1914, quoted in Becker, op. cit., p.462.
 3. Mgr. A. Pons, La Guerre et l'âme française, p.19. See also declarations quoted in Becker, op. cit., pp.462-463. The theme of Christian sacrifice was naturally to figure prominently in Catholic writings throughout the war; see, for example, Paul Bourget's novel, Le Sens de la mort, Paris, Plon, 1916; Émile Baumann, L'Abbé Chevoleau, caporal au 90e d'Infanterie, Paris, Perrin, 1917; Henri Massis, Le Sacrifice, 1914-1916, Paris, Plon, 1917.

Once again it may be asked whether Claudel's own thinking corresponded as closely to this climate of opinion as his propaganda tract suggested. And again the answer is affirmative. He was undoubtedly encouraged at the outset by the fact that his country at last seemed to be united after the sterile divisions of the past. "Cette guerre sera bonne pour nous à qui elle donne un sentiment profond d'ordre et de fraternité", he wrote to Darius Milhaud in October 1914¹.

Equally, he believed that Providence had given France the opportunity to purify herself through her willing sacrifice for a just cause. The idea of salvation through sacrifice was, in fact, to recur constantly in his writings throughout the war. It was already in his mind when he wrote optimistically to Jammes on 24 September 1914 in the heady aftermath of Joffre's success on the Marne. He pictured France rediscovering her path through the heroism of her soldiers, the protection of her saints, and, above all, the will of God:

Nous sommes complètement entre les mains de Dieu. Tout cela donne l'impression d'être conduit d'en haut, et, j'en suis persuadé, pour le salut et la régénération de notre pauvre pays. Que c'est beau, cette grande bataille qui se livre en ce moment sur toute notre frontière avec Saint Rémy et le baptistère de la France au centre, Sainte Geneviève à notre gauche, et Jeanne d'Arc sur notre droite. (...).

Que de tristesses et que de grandes choses! Tous les gens qui reviennent du front ne parlent que de l'héroïsme de nos soldats, cette forêt de baïonnettes, toute mélangée de prêtres, de moines et de missionnaires, comme une moisson l'est de fleurs.²

1. Letter to Milhaud, 30 Oct. 1914, in CPC III, p.45.

2. In Corres. PC-FJ/GF, pp.274-275.

At this stage the French nation could easily be viewed as enduring a form of collective earthly Purgatory in preparation for imminent redemption. Such was the idea behind these words in his diary for October 1914: "La Grande Bataille, comparable au feu du Purgatoire. Toute la France placée dans ce long sillon, en attendant le jour de la Résurrection. Surget in incorruptione"¹ The belief that suffering must bring its reward allowed him to reconcile himself to the general carnage and even to personal loss. Consequently, when one of his brothers-in-law was reported killed in action at the end of 1914, he was able to note: "C'est mieux ainsi. La famille de mon beau-père était digne de ce martyr. Tristesse du pauvre vieillard"². If this attitude still shocks at first, it should be remembered that the young man concerned had expressed perfect willingness for martyrdom in the last letter he wrote to his family³.

In La Nuit de Noël 1914 martyrdom is the central issue. Nearly all of the characters are represented as souls who have suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Germans. As they look down on the battlefields it is in this light that they consider the soldiers, against the backcloth of Notre-Dame-de-Reims, "la cathédrale martyre"⁴.

1. Jo. I, p.299, (Oct. 1914).

2. ibid., p.302, (Dec. 1914).

3. See ibid., p.300, (Nov. 1914), where Claudel writes:
"Il disait dans sa dernière lettre: 'Si je meurs, ne me plaignez pas, car je jouirai auprès de Dieu du bonheur réservé aux martyrs'".

4. Th. II, p.580.

Martyrdom, here, is viewed joyfully, not only as a unique privilege but as a release from "ce songe mauvais" that is human existence, for he who is chosen will reach heaven earlier as an intercessor for his fellows¹. Furthermore, this bestowal of exceptional grace is associated with miraculous conversions under fire: the soldier Jacques (an atheistic instituteur before the war) has been converted in the very moment of death through the grace accorded to Jean, the former seminarist². The meaning of the picture is clear enough: France is portrayed as returning to her allotted mission after the Germans had been stopped at Reims "où jadis la Fille aînée de l'Église a reçu baptême"³. No opportunity is lost to show that France is now defending God, and, significantly, among the fallen heroes shown on the battlefield is the body of Psichari, with arms outstretched in the form of a cross, symbolically negating the heritage of his grandfather, Renan⁴.

Lest there should be any thought that the play exaggerated Claudel's hopes at that time, it is worth adding here that on 30 January, 1915, he had written to Piero Jahier emphasising that the hand of God was behind the war. To a greater or lesser degree everyone in France was bearing material and emotional hardship, learning new

1. *ibid.*, p.582.

2. See *ibid.*, pp.573-576.

3. *ibid.*, p.581.

4. See *ibid.*, pp.586-587: also, letter to Henri Massis, 10 Feb. 1916, in "Un catholique aux globules rouges: Lettres de Paul Claudel à Henri Massis", La Table ronde, April 1955, p.89, where Claudel compliments Massis on his book, La Vie d'Ernest Psichari, (Paris, 1916) and adds: "Quel mystère, quelle parabole, que l'histoire de cette race de Renan! Oui, une fois de plus, Tu as vaincu Galiléen".

values among which selfishness and "l'amour des choses de ce monde", had no real place¹. The road towards God was now shorter than it had ever been and those who set off to the war were like "les enfants qui s'embarquent pour une expédition ou doivent se passer des choses prodigieuses abracadabrantes"². There could, in fact, be no possibility of defeat, since France was fighting "pour le droit, pour la justice, pour la liberté des peuples, pour leur droit à l'existence, pour l'amitié qui les unit, pour le triomphe de Dieu"³.

In the course of 1915 Claudel wrote many of the ultra-patriotic poems of which the fairest comment to be made is that they, like La Nuit de Noël 1914, were entirely in keeping with the grandiloquent littérature tricolore characteristic of the period⁴. In March, a particularly optimistic poem, "Aux morts des armées de la République", blended the imagery of approaching spring with joyful anticipation of triumph to come, and called on the armies of the slaughtered dead to march alongside those of the living in driving the enemy back to the Rhine⁵. In "La Vierge à midi" (probably March or April) contemplation

1. In Giordan, op. cit., p.115.

2. id.

3. id.

4. For a concise discussion indicating the enormous number of major and minor writers among the civilian population who sought to express their devotion to the French cause and to maintain national morale by writing jingoistic literature in one form or another, see Pierre-Olivier Walzer, Le XXe siècle, Vol. I (1896-1920), Paris, Arthaud, (Littérature française series), 1975, pp.56-59.

5. See Po., pp.537-539.

of the effigy of Mary in a church led Claudel to thank her for intervening "à l'heure où tout craquait" to save France once again¹. "Le Précieux Sang" (probably March or April) dwells at length on the association between Christ's Passion and the sacrifice of the French soldiers shedding their blood for France: the soldiers ask nothing in return, but Claudel implores in their name: "Nous ne vous faisons point de demande/Mais si vous avez besoin de notre amour autant que nous avons besoin de votre justice/Alors c'est que votre soif est grande"². In "Tant que vous voudrez mon général" (June) the focus shifted momentarily to a eulogy of the comradeship, the levelling of social differences, and the absolute obedience of the soldiers in the endless local attacks at the front³. But in "Derrière eux" (June), "La Grande Attente" (August), and "Si pourtant" (November), the emphasis was again on mystical-religious themes, the depth of France's sacrifice, the mingling of blood and soil⁴.

All of these works expressed or implied Claudel's continuing faith that God was defending France. But "La Grande Attente" and "Si pourtant" both give an indication of his intense need to understand why the conflict was dragging on for so long. In the former there are a number of anguished references to the fact that God is "incompréhensible" or "silencieux" and how bitter it is to bear "ce silence dont vous vous taisez, ce sommeil dont nous vous voyons

1. *ibid.*, p.540. The manuscript is undated, but the poem was first published in the Cahiers vaudois, May 1915.

2. Po., pp.542-543. The manuscript is undated, but the poem appears to have been written around the same time as "Aux morts des armées" and "La Vierge à midi": see relevant notes in Po., pp.1121, 1122.

3. See *ibid.*, pp.533-535.

4. See *ibid.*, pp.535-537, 547-554, 557-559, respectively.

dormir, qui êtes Notre Père"¹. In the latter, where the tone is less tortured, the wistful plea that victory should come sooner rather than later, was accompanied by the idea that France must remain patient, since "il se fait sans doute quelque part quelque chose à quoi nous ne sommes pas encore prêts"².

Beyond the central issue of France's struggle against Germany, there was, in any case, a question of the wider Providential purpose of the war as a global phenomenon. A letter which he wrote to Gabriel Frizeau on 25 November 1915, suggested that he had been pondering the matter. After consoling himself that, although the news from the front was unencouraging, it had been necessary for France to endure the ordeal, he had continued:

Quand j'essaye de m'élever et de **comprendre** en artiste et en chrétien, et non pas seulement en français, le plan et la vaste opération qui se déroule devant nous, il me semble que je commence à comprendre, et je suis saisi d'admiration³.

Two days later he wrote even more enthusiastically to Piero Jahier on the same theme. The extraordinarily lyrical tone of his remarks recalled his projected "Ode de la guerre".

1. *ibid.*, pp.550, 553.

2. *ibid.*, p.558.

3. In Corres. PC-FJ/GF, p.284.

Et je n'ai pas besoin de vous dire, à cette heure assez sombre, que je suis toujours et absolument confiant, confiant plus que jamais dans la victoire finale. Comme artiste, je suis depuis un an devant ce qui se passe, comme devant l'oeuvre de quelqu'un du même métier, mais infiniment plus fort que vous. Ça surprend d'abord, ça choque, ça démoralise, mais à la réflexion on comprend que c'est mieux ainsi et que ça ne pouvait pas être autrement. Cette guerre commencée en France et qui va maintenant se terminer en Orient, du côté de Constantinople et de Jérusalem, quelle idée épatante! Que c'est beau? De la Marne à l'Isonzo, à la Duina, à Baghdad, à la Grèce, un vaste drame d'un seul tenant, où prend part toute l'humanité, que c'est beau. Et que c'est beau aussi la part que votre pays y prend! Pensez que s'il avait tenu à Giolitti, il aurait joué le rôle de cette triste Grèce!¹

Unfortunately, Claudel did not elaborate on what he imagined God's plan to be, but it seems likely that he hoped France would be only one of many nations brought collectively into the fold of the universal Church. This could, perhaps, be inferred from the "Introït" of La Messe là-bas (written between May and December 1917), where he referred to the conflict in Europe as "cette grande Coopérative, la guerre, pour détruire toute autre chose que Dieu"². It is also suggested more strongly in a letter to Massis in June 1917. After some optimistic speculations on future temporal changes in the world he had remarked:

Mais au point de vue moral et religieux? Beaucoup de magnifiques sacrifices individuels comme les martyrs aux siècles des persécutions, mais les États eux-mêmes restent matériels et athées. Enfin le travail se fait toujours du centre à la périphérie³.

1. Letter to Jahier, 27 Nov. 1915, in Giordan, op. cit., p.119.

2. Po., p.493.

3. Letter to Massis, 25 June 1917, in "Un catholique aux globules rouges", p.90.

Be that as it may, Claudel's main concern was obviously for France. It would be futile to attempt to trace his every change of mood from the end of 1915 to 1918, since the evidence becomes increasingly patchy. Suffice it to say that despite his profound anguish at the continuance of the blood-letting - an emotion which was expressed particularly clearly in "Ce n'est point de nous seulement" (March 1916, during the German attack on Verdun)¹ and "Pater Noster" (part of La Messe là-bas)² - Claudel was still able to cling to the belief that at least he was witnessing a "grande oeuvre de martyre et de purification", as he put it to Massis in June 1917³. At times he must have felt terrible fear, but he presumably managed to rationalise the seemingly endless duration of the war on the grounds that France and the other belligerents had not yet suffered sufficiently to expiate their past crimes. Thus, in "Sainte Geneviève" during the mighty German offensive of spring 1918, he impatiently exhorted France to rise up from the mire (physical mire of the trenches, spiritual mire of the past) to throw back the Satanic invaders:

1. See Po., pp.556-557: also Jo. I, pp.355, (29 Feb. 1916), 357, (March 1916), 359-360, (30 April 1916) and letter to Massis, 8 March 1916, in "Un catholique aux globules rouges", p.90 for further references to his intense anxiety during those weeks. On the other hand, "A l'Italie", which appears to have been written at some later date during that year (see relevant notes, Po., pp.1123-1124) the tone is more confident.
2. See ibid., pp.513-514.
3. Letter to Massis, 25 June 1917, in "Un catholique aux globules rouges"; p.90. See also, letter to Frizeau, 10 May 1917, Corres. PC-FJ/GF, pp.292-293: "Quels jours tragiques et grandioses nous vivons! Vous rappelez-vous nos conversations du mois d'août 1914? Et depuis ce temps les massacres n'ont pas cessé, bien que la miséricorde de Dieu n'ait cessé visiblement d'être étendue sur nous".

Derrière ces tranchées et derrière ces réseaux
de fils de fer, c'est ton Dieu, peuple de France, qui
t'attend!/Arrache-toi à cette boue affreuse, vois ton
Dieu! lève-toi, peuple de France, et saute dedans!/
N'en as-tu pas assez depuis ces quatre ans et depuis deux
siècles de la boue et de ce paysage horrible et bête,/
Tel que te l'ont fait ces philosophes grotesques et toutes
ces hideuses espèces de poètes,/Avec ton héritage dévasté
et ces cathédrales en ruines?/Depuis le temps qu'on t'a
tourné de force la figure vers l'orient, ne vois-tu pas
que la nuit est finie pour de bon et le ciel presque
bleu qui s'illumine?/La terre est faite pour les morts,
et toi n'en as-tu pas depuis quatre ans par-dessus la
tête?/(....)./ Et moi, je crie vers mon pays, et je
pleure! et je serai là le jour de la victoire, et c'est
demain!¹

While the Germans were subsequently being driven back after the failure of their offensive, Claudel's mood of patriotic fervour was indirectly reflected in "Saint Louis" (completed in November 1918), celebrating the saintly king's piety, military valour, justice, charismatic leadership and eternal spiritual marriage with France². But it seems probable that on the spiritual level, at least, the immediate aftermath of the victory was to disappoint Claudel. When he was writing "Saint Martin" between November 1918 and September 1919 he must already have been aware that there had been no miraculous, total transformation of France or the rest of Europe and the wider world. God had shown his power by crushing Germany's evil revolt, but that was the only fact of which Claudel appeared certain. The role of France as portrayed in the poem seemed ambiguous, rather than glorious:

C'est le mal vivant qui vient rechercher le bien en
nous qui était mort./C'est cela tout plein d'enfer qui
vient voir si c'est vrai que nous sommes creux et abandonnés!/
C'est cela qui vient se venger sur nous de la vie que nous
n'avons pas su donner!³

1. Po., pp.645-646.

2. ibid., pp.651-662.

3. ibid., p.673.

What, then, was the positive spiritual meaning of the victory? At this stage Claudel could only imply that it was part of a mystery which surpassed human understanding:

Le canon sur tout le front s'est tu, et la
poussée préparée s'est dissoute, et le cri dans la
gorge s'est défait, / Il y a un terme qui secrètement
est atteint, il y a un compte qui se trouve réglé,
il y a quelque chose d'obscur qui est satisfait. /
L'homme ne sait rien, sinon que son sang a coulé!
et sinon cela que le sang de la France a coulé, et
que son âme s'est séparée en deux et que le sang a
coulé d'elle-même comme un fleuve!¹

E. Looking Ahead

Throughout this chapter the focus has been entirely on Claudel's attempts to assign an underlying spiritual significance to the war. The evidence available simply does not offer a basis for discussing his views on more down-to-earth political matters relating to the running of the country, or to Allied war aims. However, in anticipation of the opinions which he was to hold during the 1920s and 1930s, it is worth mentioning here that there had been one or two brief hints of the type of general, long-term changes which he had hoped would result from the cataclysmic upheaval.

On the one hand, there had been a suggestion that the massive extent of the conflict, the formation of vast groupings of allied nations, and the need for rationalisation of resources to maintain

1. *ibid.*, p.674.

the war effort had reinforced the taste for broad schemes of international collaboration which he had shown in the first draft of Sous le signe du dragon.

A letter that he had written to Piero Jahier in December 1915 had referred to the fact that he had "de grands projets en tête"¹. The particular scheme which he mentioned was his desire to see a Franco-Italian customs union "qui rendrait la Méditerranée aux Latins, et les ferait maîtres de la principale position du monde, entre trois continents l'estuaire, le débouché de la terre entière"². This, he claimed, was simply a practical application of the modern principle of entente or cartel, as opposed to competition. He also foresaw that when the war was over they would witness the formation of "quelques grands blocs au milieu desquels il est impossible que la France et l'Italie subsistent isolées"³.

He was to allude briefly to the idea of closer Franco-Italian ties again on two occasions before the end of the war, even suggesting in one letter that Italy should be given a "concession" in the port of Bordeaux if the great Bordeaux-Odessa railway was ever built⁴.

1. Letter to Jahier, 3 Dec. 1915, in Giordan, op. cit., p.125.

2. id.

3. id.

4. See letters to Camille Mallarmé, 19 Oct. 1917 (for reference to the concession idea), and 24 Sept. 1918, published in Jean-Louis Courtault-Deslandes, "Paul Claudel et Eleonora Duse", BSPC 72, Oct. - Dec. 1978, pp.40, 42.

But the more important point to be kept in mind was his attraction to the general principle of broad international groupings and collaboration on the model of the cartel. The same manner of thinking was apparent when he wrote to Massis in June 1917 predicting that after the war there would be an "interpénétration plus grande des nations - meilleur aménagement des ressources de l'Europe et de la planète"¹. Moreover, in this letter he also prophesied that a more rational form of organisation would emerge within the individual nations themselves; an "abolition dans la forme des sociétés de ce qui était dû à la seule tradition et au hasard", and a "meilleure construction des États"².

These were merely vague, fragmentary remarks, but the hopes which they expressed were by no means ephemeral. On the contrary, we shall see in the next two chapters (dealing with his views on French society and on foreign affairs, respectively) that his words to Massis provided a valuable signpost to the development of his ideas during the inter-war period.

1. Letter to Massis, 25 June 1917, in "Un catholique aux globules rouges", p.90.

2. id.

CHAPTER IV. Progress and Tradition

A. Opening remarks

During the inter-war period Claudel's interest in the idea of change towards a better-organised, more united society was to be manifested in different forms according to changing circumstances. In the years of relative political and economic stability before the upheavals of the 1930s, he showed no sign of being preoccupied by the need for transformation of the political system as such, although he remained critical of it. Having resigned himself to the continued existence of the Third Republic before the war, there was even less reason for him to be obsessed by the question in the calmer atmosphere of the 1920s. Moreover, he himself was at the peak of his career in the service of the Republic: by the late 1920s he was a leading ambassador, a Grand Officier of the Légion d'Honneur, and the owner of a recently acquired château in the Isère - no small advance for the son of a provincial petit fonctionnaire.

At this time his attention was turned to more general speculations on the development of society. Over the space of nearly three years, between the summer of 1925 and the spring of 1928, he was intermittently engaged in writing his Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher. Certain parts of this book, and some related correspondence, will be discussed in this chapter, since they show Claudel taking stock of the modern world and showing, by means of illustrations drawn from particular areas of social existence, how a new spirit of community and co-operation might emerge in the future.

As will be seen, it was only when the crises of the 1930s seemed to threaten the whole established order in France that he turned more closely to specifically political issues, though still approaching them in the light of the basic social objectives which he had outlined in the 1920s. While reacting with his customary vigour against those whom he saw as trying to change society too drastically or in the wrong direction, he would then call for a more efficient form of government and new policies to reunite the nation.

However, before we consider his ideas in detail, some general observations may be made on his perception of his own position. It will, in fact, be found that many of his views were conservative or were at least based on traditional conceptions. But his belief in the need for a positive, rather than a negative attitude towards the development of society led him to see himself as being opposed to the forces of conservatism.

In 1919, unlike most Catholics in France, Claudel greeted the advent of the conservative Bloc national with very little pleasure. Referring contemptuously in his diary to the "esprit petit-bourgeois, petit boutiquier, petit commerçant" of the Bloc, he described it as "un parti venant de divers côtés, dépourvu de tout idéal quelconque"¹. The events of the following years evidently served to heighten this impression, for in 1924 he was even more unusual among Catholics in welcoming the election of the Cartel des gauches. In a letter written to his brother-in-law's wife explaining his attitude, he declared

1. Jo. I, p.463, (Dec. 1919).

himself ready to accept the Cartel's anticlerical policies, and even its inclusion of the Socialists, as a bearable price to pay for the fall of Poincaré and the ending of "le régime des gens de l'Écho de Paris et de l'Action française".¹ And he added: "Du côté du socialisme du moins il y a la vie et les grands horizons humains".²

It is clear from his letter that much of his resentment against the Bloc was related to foreign policy and to his personal dislike of Poincaré, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Equally, there were personal, as well as political reasons for his detesting the influence of the Action Française group. In 1919 a letter which he wrote to Henri Massis had shown his continued distaste for Maurras's "Kaisérisme intellectuelle", atheism, and "politique d'abord" mentality.³ But since then, possibly as a result of the scathing remarks which he had also made to Massis on the subject of Maurras's aesthetic theory, Claudel had found his own literary works subjected to a particularly biting attack by Pierre Lasserre.⁴

Be that as it may, his letter in June 1924, commenting on the fall of the Bloc, makes it evident that regardless of any other factors affecting his views, he had disliked the narrow social conservatism which it represented. In concluding the letter he even suggested that

1. Letter to Elizabeth Sainte-Marie-Perrin, 5 June 1924, ASPC.

2. *id.*

3. Letter to Massis, 6 July 1919, in "Un catholique aux globules rouges", *op. cit.*, p.91. See also "Une heure avec Paul Claudel retour d'Amérique", interview with Frédéric Lefèvre, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 7 May 1927, where Claudel approves the recent papal condemnation of Action Française, expresses distaste for the political dogmatism and unchristian spirit of the movement, and condemns the systematic violence of its attacks on the leadership of the Republic. And see Léon Daudet, "Une lettre de Léon Daudet," L'Action française, 7 May 1927, for a biting reply, accusing Claudel of opportunism.

4. See, Pierre Lasserre, Les Chapelles littéraires, Paris, Garnier, 1920. For discussion of the critical controversy stirred by this attack, see Friche, Études claudéliennes, pp.11-14.

new anticlerical measures might serve a Providential purpose, since Catholics had been living in ivory towers for too long and devoting themselves exclusively to the rich, whereas it was the poor who really needed their attention. Finally, after apologising for the shock his letter must be causing, he closed with the words, "mais un jour vous verrez que la vérité n'est pas du côté de la bourgeoisie égoïste et racornie"¹.

It is possible, of course, that he was being deliberately provocative on that occasion, but the same idea of opposition to the forces of conservatism can also be found in an interview which he gave to Frédéric Lefèvre in March 1925. This time, he poured scorn on Barrès's worship of tradition, contrasting the doctrine of "la terre et les morts" with his own idea of "la mer et les vivants", and pointing out that whereas Barrès had been turned towards the past, he himself was "attiré par l'avenir"².

Similarly, when he wrote a preface to a book of essays by Jacques Rivière some three months later he went out of his way to decry those who were attracted to Catholicism (and here he was evidently thinking particularly of the Maurrassians) because they saw the Church primarily as the guardian of social conservatism:

1. Letter to E. Sainte-Marie-Perrin, 5 June 1924, ASPC.

2. In Frédéric Lefèvre, "Une heure avec M. Paul Claudel, poète et dramaturge", Les Nouvelles littéraires, 18 April, 1925. See also letter to Massis, 10 July 1923, in art cit., p.93 also evincing contempt for Barrès's "idéologie sans substance"; and, for the idea of looking to the future, letter to René Schwob, 24 Dec. 1929, in Pierre Angel, Lettres inédites sur l'inquiétude moderne, Paris, Éds. universelles, 1951, p.151.

Que de platitudes, que de tirades nauséabondes n'avons-nous pas dû absorber sur la valeur sociale du Christianisme, sur les secours qu'il apporte à l'ordre établi et à la sacro-sainte 'tradition', sur l'apaisement qu'il fournit aux employeurs et aux propriétaires, sur son alliance naturelle avec les Autorités Constituées! De quel ton incroyable de condescendance consent-on à lui faire sa place à côté d'Auguste Comte parmi les Cariatides qui sont appelées à soutenir le trône de la Déesse nation!¹

He had gone on to point out that although the Church might condemn political revolt, and accept "ces grands principes naturels sur lesquels reposent les sociétés, honneur, famille, patrie, propriété", these were not absolute ends in themselves². Moreover, he emphasised his belief that in Christian societies, unlike the civilisations of the East, there had always been an element of movement and development. The Christian society was something vital and changing, rather than a "série monotone de relèvements et de ruines, de dynasties l'une à l'autre exactement pareilles"³.

Looking further ahead to the 1930s the same attitude was to be implicit in his writings, as was his desire to stand apart from the old Right. For instance, in a letter to Mauriac on 16 July 1935 he would remark:

Il est très important que nous ne fassions pas figure de réactionnaires, d'un bloc bourgeois opposé au bloc populaire, ou, comme on dit en anglais, des in contre les out, des have contre les have not ⁴.

1. Preface, dated June 1925, to Jacques Rivière, A la trace de Dieu, (Paris, Gallimard, 1925), p.17.

2. *ibid.*, p.20.

3. *ibid.*, p.19.

4. ASPC, Dossier Francois Mauriac.

Or again, a year later in the draft for an enthusiastic article on the Croix de Feu, he had felt it necessary to add:

On a dit que les Croix de Feu étaient une organisation de droite uniquement consacrée à la défense des positions acquises. Rien n'est plus faux, j'aime à le croire¹.

However we may choose to classify his social and political ideas in retrospect, it is as well to remember this view of himself as an opponent of the forces of conservatism. With this in mind, we can now turn to consider the themes of unity and social organisation in the Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher.

B. Reflections on Modern Society

The central theme underlying the Conversations is, as Claudel himself described it, "cet art pour les hommes de vivre ensemble"². It is a deliberately meandering book which is intended as a leisurely, impressionistic exploration of ideas, rather than as coherent, linear argument. The dialogue form allows the author to indulge his taste for paradoxes, harmonies, contradictions and flights of imagination. It makes no attempt to deal thoroughly with the issues which it raises, but in a number of areas that concern us it offers a valuable bridge between Claudel's pre-war writings and his political stance during the 1930s.

1. "Mon opinion sur les Croix de Feu", draft dated 20 May 1936, in ASPC, File "Articles économiques et politiques". I have been unable to find any trace of this article appearing in print.
2. Pr., p.667. For a full, if somewhat uncritical exposition of the Conversations, see Yves Cosson, Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher de Paul Claudel, Univ. de Rennes, Faculté des Lettres, (thèse de 3e cycle), 1970.

In "Jeudi", the first section of the book, Claudel took the opportunity to air a number of questions which had interested him in the past. A first important point to be noted at this stage is that although his ideas were often expressed more clearly than they had been during the pre-war years, their essence remained fundamentally the same.

Among the subjects raised again was that of the relationship between the individual and society. In this context he still offered the personalistic conception which had previously formed the basis for his "Propositions sur la justice". On the one hand, he poured scorn on the extreme individualist who could regard "l'arrangement d'un homme avec ses semblables" as an unwelcome constraint on his own freedom¹. On the other hand, he also rejected any theory which considered the individual as "pas autre chose que fonction de la société", an anonymous, automated cog in a giant mechanism².

Between these two extremes lay his personalistic ideal of balance between organic social unity and the unique value of the individual. In this perspective society was now described as "une sollicitation vivante, une incitation à chacun de fournir ce qu'il peut", offering the fulfilment of the individual because it was only possible for his unique qualities to emerge in response to the complementary needs of others³.

However, whilst this might represent the principle of the social bond, there were autobiographical references to the unsociable,

1. Pr., p.681.

2. id.

3. id.

individualistic side of Claudel's own nature¹, and to his wider assumption that in practice people were unwilling to recognise how much they needed each other². Indeed, the existence of this contradiction could be conveniently used to reject the socialist utopia on the grounds that it sought to mass everyone together "en vrac" without first solving the fundamental problem of making them want to co-operate with each other "au lieu que de se faire du mal"³. Conversely, it also served to justify a gradualist position implicitly opposed to the straightforward application of any new system. As Acer puts it, "la vie des hommes les uns dans les autres est un art, un art très long et délicat à apprendre"⁴.

As to the present state of society, Claudel described it in "Jeudi" as being in a process of transition and riddled with contradictions - "à cheval sur deux manières d'être avec les inconvénients de l'une et de l'autre"⁵. On the negative side of this picture his criticisms of the modern world again extended themes which had appeared in his earlier writings. His main concern was still with the dehumanising effects of materialistic values and the impoverishment of social relations to which he believed this process had led.

1. See *ibid.*, pp.670; 671; 673. Compare, for example, *Jo.* I, p.644, (Sept. 1924): "J'ai hérité de l'orgueil et de l'insociabilité de mon père".

2. See, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 673, 720.

3. *ibid.*, p.673.

4. *ibid.*, p.674.

5. *ibid.*, p.684

He lamented that money had become the sole measure of men's service to each other. In the past, he claimed, services had been exchanged in kind, sometimes even for no material reward, and money had merely been "un appoint"¹. Now, there was no longer any idea of voluntary giving and receiving: the value of every human task was calculated in precise monetary terms, and the individual who rendered service was reduced to a mercenary, with society obsessed by the sterile, divisive quest for a mythical "juste rapport" between labour and payment². He also claimed that the immediacy of the social relationship had been eroded by the conditions of modern industry: the individual was a slave to the production machine, accomplishing mechanical tasks, alienated from himself and from his fellows. Hence, in the words of Furius:

Il n'y a plus entre les hommes de rapports essentiels, fondés sur des nécessités personnelles et des besoins réciproques où l'on ne peut nous substituer. (....). Mes mains sont liées, mon coeur n'est plus qu'une espèce de moteur monobloc, mes pieds sont assujettis au tapis roulant et l'on a mis un ratelier à la hauteur de ma bouche. (....). Un singe dressé ferait la même chose que moi. Je ne suis plus qu'un organe mécanique et non plus un enfant de Dieu plein de besoins et de secours, débordant de nécessités et de ressources! On m'a ôté le Paradis terrestre qui est la possibilité de faire du bien sans salaire et par libre choix³.

To this extent Claudel remained marked by his earlier reaction against the ugliness, the impersonality and venality of the frenetic industrial world. Thus, it comes as no surprise to find reminders

1. *ibid.*, p.685.

2. *id.*

3. *ibid.*, pp. 685 - 686; see also p.688.

of his old revulsion against the modern city. In particular, he complained that the traditional extended family was contracting and disintegrating in the urban environment. The cramped flats and suburban boxes of modern Paris, themselves the symbol of narrow, selfish minds, were seen as signs of "une dégénérescence" or "un rabougrissement" within the social consciousness¹. In contrast to this, Claudel presented nostalgic descriptions of "la grande maison de famille carrée, telle que nos aïeux y vivaient"², and of the rich social life of the small provincial town³. Or, looking further afield, he returned to the example of the traditional Chinese clan as an illustration of what a real family could be - "quelque chose d'étonnamment vivace et puissant à la manière d'un véritable organe collectif"⁴. However, although it is not mentioned in the Conversations, his criticisms were not restricted solely to the urban, industrial world. For example, in a letter to Georges Duhamel in 1931, he drew a parallel between the mean-minded individualism symbolised by the suburban villa surrounded by walls topped with broken glass, and the mentality of the peasantry, whose outlook he also saw as characterised by selfishness, distrust, and his old enemy, malthusianism. The French peasantry, he maintained, gave him the impression of "une race qui s'éteint, des Peaux-rouges et des Maoris"⁵.

1. *ibid.*, p.675: see also p.680.

2. *id.*

3. *ibid.*, pp.694 - 695.

4. *ibid.*, p.680.

5. Letter to Duhamel, 21 March 1931, ASPC, Dossier Georges Duhamel. Claudel remarked in this letter that his views were based on his observation of the peasantry at Brangues, but see also Jo. I, pp. 508, 509 (June 1921) for similar impressions when visiting his birthplace, and Jo. II, pp. 214 - 215 (Dec. 1937) for long recollections of depressing imprint left on his mind by his childhood visits to Villeneuve.

Taken together, Claudel's criticisms of modern society thus echoed the Catholic traditionalist's reaction against a world in which sterile materialistic values dominated, the individual had lost his sense of identity, and exchange of services had become an impersonal, mechanical process. Even the environment created by man could be seen as attesting to a contraction of the human spirit and a loss of real community. But he had said in "Jeudi" that society was in transition, and he also claimed that there were existing factors which might make for the emergence of a new sense of community¹. He was not, of course, setting out to draw up an overall blueprint. What interested him was to show "non pas les routes mais l'orientation de la carte future"². How, then, did he conceive the direction in which society should move?

One direction in which he evidently did not want to see it move was towards the abolition of private ownership or the establishment of economic equality. On the one hand, true to his earlier writings on the question of justice, he restated his ideal of a society guided by the spirit of Christian love, awareness of mutual need, and the desire to serve others³. On the other hand, whilst he might stress the primacy of the moral over the economic, and show no inclination to discuss the concrete problem of wealth and poverty, that did not prevent him from specifically making his case against economic equality; firstly, because "il n'y a qu'au Jugement dernier que chacun recevra selon ses oeuvres"; and secondly, on the equally time-worn argument that equality would deprive society of the necessary element

1. See Pr., p.691.

2. ibid., p.687.

3. See ibid., pp.683, 719 - 721.

of imbalance and incentive which were the sources of movement¹. Thus, in the words of Civilis: "il faut intéresser la partie. Il faut qu'il y ait un certain jeu, un certain hasard, un certain vide, un certain déficit qu'il est à la fois impossible et indispensable de réparer"². Finally, it is perhaps worth adding that in the final section of the book Claudel quoted from Leo XIII's encyclical, Rerum Novarum, to justify private property as long as it was considered to be held for God's purpose, not to be used and abused as an end in itself³.

Bearing in mind Claudel's continued vagueness and apparent conservatism in this area, we can examine his outlook on the future. Here, the idea of association, which had attracted him before the war, had its counterpart in his belief that the time might now be ripe for the growth of new, richer forms of social grouping which would answer to modern conditions and bring people to work together for a common purpose⁴. In his view this tendency had already manifested itself in various ways in other countries of the world:

Mais en Allemagne, par exemple, nous trouvons la passion du chœur et le développement d'une énorme vie industrielle s'étendant en largeur et en profondeur et dont l'ouvrier commence à faire partie non plus seulement pour quelques heures, mais dans son corps, dans son âme, dans sa famille et dans son habitation. De même en Amérique. En Angleterre nous trouvons des choses comme le club, comme l'étroite discipline des trade unions,

1. *ibid.*, p.682.

2. *id.*

3. *ibid.*, pp.782 - 783, 817 - 818.

4. See *ibid.*, p.674.

comme les équipes sportives. En Italie il y a les factions et cet intense esprit de famille et de municipale ¹.

From this eclectic set of examples it seemed that Claudel could be attracted by almost any form of organisation which served to bring people into contact and collaboration with each other. This is also apparent in his references to the more promising signs which he considered to weigh against the unwelcome aspects of modern development in the fields of urbanisation, industrialism, and the rural community.

With regard to the urban environment and the contraction of the family, in "Jeudi" Claudel suggested that smaller dwellings, smaller family units and the disappearance of servants could induce city-dwellers to associate voluntarily to provide various services in common - as they had already begun to do in London and New York - thus paving the way for a higher level of co-operation². He did not enter into detail as to how far he imagined this co-operation might extend, but the underlying idea was obviously that the breakdown of the old natural communities could be counterbalanced by wider, voluntary forms of organisation.

Moreover, in the third section of the book, completed in America at the beginning of 1928, Claudel allowed his imagination to

1. *ibid.*, p.693.

2. See *ibid.*, pp.687, 692.

roam far wider, reflecting the mood of a decade which had seen an immense flowering of interest in new conceptions of architecture and urban planning. Discussion of the architectural styles which he had observed in other countries led him to the reverie of a whole city in which the very form of the environment would express the unity of the inhabitants. The details need not concern us here. Suffice it to note the intention expressed by the words: "elle n'est pas une simple juxtaposition de cellules, mais une étroite solidarité d'organes et de besoins communiquant dans toutes ses parties"¹.

The goal of social unity and collaboration also served as the basis for his dream of an agrarian commune, which bore a distant, and probably accidental resemblance to the Fourierist phalanstère.² In "Jeudi" he had merely pointed out that there was a need for more efficient organisation of agriculture, and had made a few vague remarks on the possibility of city-dwellers spending part of their time working on the land³. However, in later parts of the book, and in correspondence with Henri Pourrat in 1929, he dwelt on the idea of a Christian co-operative community based on collective private ownership. It was not intended to have material gain as its primary objective, but was to provide an environment in which the members could live and work together in an atmosphere of Christian worship. Thus, he put it to Henri Pourrat:

1. *ibid.*, p.752.

2. It would seem, however, that Claudel did have some knowledge of Fourier's ideas. See *Jo*, I, p.691, (Sept. 1925): "Fourier reproche à Dieu de n'avoir pas créé un certain nombre d'animaux utilitaires et perfectionnés tels que les anti-baleines, ou remorqueurs de navires par les temps calmes .. ", though he does not refer to the phalanstères.

3. *ibid.*, p.890.

Ses participants n'auraient pas pour but de gagner de l'argent (jamais la fortune n'a procuré moins de jouissances qu'aujourd'hui) mais de faire leur salut et de tirer de la fraternité humaine les merveilleux trésors que l'individualisme actuel néglige ¹.

Within the community, the family would remain the basic unit, but would be embedded in a wider framework. Each family would enjoy the privacy of its own flat, but all shared services, various social activities, agricultural and other forms of production would be run on a co-operative basis, and everyone would take their part in the labour². The inspiration for this dream evidently came from a wide variety of sources. Claudel had shown a passing interest in co-operation (in the technical sense of the term) before the war, when he had imagined an embryonic scheme for co-operative production of literary editions in 1909, and for co-operative libraries in 1910³. On the other hand, as he stated in the Conversations, the immediate spur to his present scheme had been found in Italy, at Oropa, a hostel for pilgrims, which Claudel had visited during the war⁴. But in addition to this, his letters to Pourrat also refer to the Gallo-Roman villa as his architectural model, and, as a social model, the traditional Chinese village communities where everyone had had enough, he claimed, but no-one could become excessively rich⁵. Such was Claudel's rural utopia: he had laughed at himself for suggesting

1. Letter to Pourrat, 30 June, and see also letter 26 July 1929, both ASPC, Dossier Henri Pourrat. See Pr., pp.770 - 773, 818.

2. See Pr., pp.771 - 772.

3. See letters to Gide, 1 July 1909 and 2 June 1910, Corres. PC-AG, pp.105, 135 - 136.

4. See Pr., pp.770 - 771.

5. See letters to Pourrat, 30 June and 26 July 1929, Dossier Pourrat.

it in the Conversations¹, but it will be seen later that the idea was to grow, rather than fade in his mind during the 1930s.

Finally, in the industrial field, unity and organisation were again the keynote, but in this case his position was rather different, for he did not, as yet, have any great changes to suggest. In "Jeudi" he deplored the mechanical nature of work on the production line and voiced his horror of the clamour and ugliness of the factory, but as against this he was struck by the fact that the conditions of modern industry had accustomed large bodies of men to work together "sous la forme de services et d'ateliers entre eux se pénétrant et se nourrissant par toutes sortes de rameaux multiples, complexes et délicats"². And he showed an almost Saint-Simonian enthusiasm for the industrial firm as a model of efficient, harmonious organisation - an organic whole based on rational organisation, collaboration and mutual need³. This was not, incidentally, an entirely new idea for Claudel: a letter which he wrote to Gabriel Frizeau in 1912 had alluded to "une certaine ressemblance bizarre" between the organic, hierarchical structure of the capitalist industrial enterprise and that of the Catholic Church⁴.

1. See Pr., p.818: "Et j'ajoute que pour vous et moi elle a cette immense supériorité que pour le moment elle n'appartient qu'au domaine de l'imagination".

2. Pr., pp.687 - 688.

3. See ibid., pp.689 - 690.

4. Letter to Frizeau, 14 Feb. 1912, Corres. PC-FJ/GF, p.243.

In the last section of the Conversations the picture had become wider and more abstract, reflecting the impact of his American experience and, perhaps, the influence of Henry Ford, whose Today and Tomorrow he had read with considerable interest in 1927¹. Claudel now appeared as the prophet of mass production and technological progress. He used musical imagery to describe the inexorable, rhythmic process of industrial production in America as "une espèce de jazz formidable" in which man's intelligence combined with the forces of nature². Vast armies of workers were seen moving together "comme les soldats en marche au son de la musique militaire"³. Indeed, he was now prepared to excuse the monotony of work on the production line by equating it with the regularity of dance movements. Moreover, he also suggested that the similarity of manual tasks might become a source of job mobility in the future, so that men could acquaint themselves with a whole range of productive activity⁴.

Several other aspects of the Conversations will be discussed in the next chapter within the wider context of Claudel's views on

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1. Passages from Today and Tomorrow quoted without comment in Jo. I, pp.755, 756 (Jan. 1927): see letter to Duhamel, 25 Oct. 1927, Dossier Duhamel, where, in the course of deriding Soviet Russia, Claudel remarks that "jamais n'est arrivée de Russie depuis dix ans une idée ingénieuse, hardie, vraiment intelligente, comme celles qui fourmillent p. ex. dans les livres de Henry Ford".
 2. Pr., p.793. See also, letter to Duhamel, 21 March 1931, Dossier Duhamel, replying to criticisms of mechanisation of labour in America: "Monotonie du travail. - Il y a celle de l'ouvrier à sa machine, beaucoup moins stupide que vous ne croyez, car après tout il est attaché à un organe infiniment délicat, à une espèce de chef d'oeuvre, à une force immense et intelligente, sans parler de tout ce travail étonnant des grandes usines dont l'apologie m'entraînerait trop loin".
 3. *ibid.*, p.794.
 4. See *id.*

international relations. For the present, suffice it to emphasise the crucial factors which have emerged so far, and to add one further point. Firstly, Claudel's willingness to condemn the godless materialism, the sterility and the impersonality of modern society should not be underestimated. In this respect his thinking remained deeply marked by the religious and social tensions of the pre-1914 period. His damning comments in the Conversations were only some among many illustrations of this aspect of his outlook. For example, in 1929, when he was trying to convert the American millionairess Agnes Meyer, his letters to her contained savage allusions to the manifestations of these evils in American society¹. Equally, in his exegetical work, Au milieu des vitraux de l'Apocalypse (begun in 1928 or early 1929 and completed in 1932) the often nightmarish text of Revelations gave him ample basis for his denunciations².

On the other hand, Claudel still held to the ideals of moral unity, charity and the sanctification of social life (however little he himself was suited to it). He was fascinated by the changing patterns of civilisation, and he showed an eclectic interest in forms of organisation or association which brought people to co-operate in their practical activities. It was in this spirit that he wrote to Georges Duhamel in March 1931:

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1. See letters to Agnes Meyer, 19 July (conformism of modern society), 28 Aug. (mechanical homo technicus, and the organisation of leisure), 17 Sept. 1929 ("la civilisation matérialiste" in America and Europe), "Lettres de Paul Claudel à Agnes Meyer, 1928 - 1929", in Eugène Roberto (ed.), Claudel et l'Amérique II, CCC VI, pp. 96, 130, 136-137.
 2. See, for example, OC XXVI, pp. 123-133 (materialism, conformism, mechanisation, etc.), and passim - all of these seen as manifestations of mankind's revolt against God throughout history.

En avant par-dessus les morts! Nous sommes embarqués bon gré mal gré pour un nouveau type de civilisation qu'on peut appeler collective et que j'aimerais mieux appeler chorale ¹.

A final point needs to be mentioned here. Although Claudel did not appear concerned by the need for political change at that time, there were at least indications of where his preferences lay. In April 1918, while France was still organised under wartime conditions, there had been a revealing note in his diary to the effect that: "Plus nous allons et plus du régime de la liberté nous devons passer à celui de la compétence. Ex. l'hygiène, où ce sont non plus les députés mais les médecins qui décident et d'une manière draconienne"². Later, in his diary for May 1923, and again in "Jeudi" he drew pointed comparisons between parliamentary government and the industrial firm as two opposing models of organisation. The former, he described in "Jeudi" as "cette vague et incertaine assemblée, issue de l'humeur et du hasard, parfois même de la corruption"³. Arbitrary, inefficient and subject to every whim of public opinion, it was headed by "des gens désintéressés de l'exécution" - politicians with no direct involvement in the practical implementation of their own decisions⁴.

1. Letter to Duhamel, 21 March 1931, Dossier Duhamel.

2. Jo. I, p.402.

3. Pr., p.689. See also Jo. I, p.594 containing virtually the same arguments as "Jeudi".

4. Pr., p.689.

In contrast, he lauded the industrial firm. As has already been noted, it impressed him as a coherent, organic whole. Moreover, it possessed two outstanding virtues: a sense of corporate effort towards a specific goal, with each member trained to carry out tasks for which he was suited; management by "des chefs compétents" under the overall leadership of "le patron comme un monarque absolu mais qui ne cesse pas d'être responsable par tous les atomes de son capital et que son incapacité élimine automatiquement"¹. Without drawing premature conclusions as to a possible evolution from his former ill-defined monarchism to a possible desire for an authoritarian technocratic system, it can nevertheless be said that these ideas anticipate the type of political solutions which he was to favour during the crises of the 1930s.

C. Capitalism and Neo-Capitalism

Although the Conversations had shown that Claudel was far from espousing the cause of the socialist or communist Left, there is no evidence that the threat of Marxism was central to his thoughts during the 1920s. However, it is significant that, after initially viewing the Russian Revolution with more curiosity than horror², by 1927 his attitude had crystallised into utter revulsion. This was exhibited in a letter to Duhamel after the publication of the latter's Voyage à Moscou, which Claudel regarded as excessively indulgent

1. id.

2. See Jo. I, pp.462;

towards the Soviet regime. The tone of the letter, which was emotional rather than rational, may be judged from this comment on the Russian leadership:

Les bolcheviks me paraissent d'affreux primaires avec l'étroitesse de cervelle et la dureté de coeur que l'instruction absorbée par des cerveaux à la fois médiocres et fanatiques entraîne généralement avec elle. Le tout accompagné par la sombre fureur que fait naître en général la conscience de la médiocrité, ce qu'on appelle l'inferiority complex.¹

News of atrocities in the Soviet Union naturally reinforced his position. He rapidly came to speculate that Lenin had been an incarnation of the Antichrist, and his reading of the Scriptures suggested to him that the prophecy relating to Gog and Magog applied particularly to Russia². Thus, it is not surprising that when the world slump began to bite in France, and the political system showed signs of being unable to weather the economic crises, he should have been one of the many who desperately feared that his country would be plunged into a similar revolutionary chaos, and thence into tyranny.

He was therefore particularly intolerant of any signs of treachery or weakness within the Catholic camp, especially among its intellectuals - the class which he had for long regarded as

1. Claudel, letter to Duhamel, 25 Oct. 1927, Dossier Duhamel. See also Jo. I, p.796, (Dec. 1927).
2. See Jo. I, p.837, (Nov. 1928); Claudel, letter to R. Schwob, 24 Dec. 1929 in Angel, op. cit., p.151; Claudel, Au milieu des vitraux de l'Apocalypse, OC XXVI, p.260.

innately subversive and prone to ideological abstractions¹. So it happened that he involved himself in a series of disputes with other Catholic writers whom he saw as flirting with the revolutionary cause. The first of these debates began in December 1932: in this case, his unwilling adversary was René Schwob, a convert with whom he had been in correspondence since 1927. The causes of Claudel's initial outburst were incidental criticisms of liberal capitalism which Schwob had made in a book he had written about Gide². These were treated by Claudel as being tantamount to advocating bolshevism, and hence as being typical of the dangerous intellectual fad of the moment:

Je trouve aussi plus de pétulance que de raison dans vos invectives de la fin contre le capitalisme. Qu'appellez-vous capitalisme sinon le régime de la liberté? Préférez-vous l'esclavage bolchevik? (....) Si vous étiez au courant comme je suis obligé de l'être de ce qui se passe là-bas, vous seriez moins enthousiaste. Le singulier snobisme qui existe dans les milieux intellectuels pour ce régime de baignade est une chose bien surprenante.³

Schwob made a long, reasoned reply to the effect that criticism of capitalism was emphatically not, in his case, allied with support

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1. See, for example, in the Conversations, his famous recollections of the old Chinese system for dealing with this breed (Pr., pp.677 - 679).
 2. See R. Schwob, Le Vrai drame d'André Gide, Paris, Grasset, 1932, pp.339 - 345 (though the emphasis is really on the absolute opposition between Christianity and communism).
 3. Letter to Schwob, 12 Dec. 1932, in Angel, op. cit., p.158.

for bolshevism¹, but Claudel's next letter was still to be couched in terms of an absolute choice between the fundamentally good - capitalism - and the fundamentally bad - bolshevism - which led to the conclusion that: "Toute attitude 'anticapitaliste' est du mauvais romantisme"².

On several occasions in 1935 it was the turn of the Esprit group and its allies to be attacked in letters to Jacques Madaule. They would be described as "médiocres intellectuels remplis d'eux-mêmes", preaching anger and destruction because they knew nothing of Christian charity³. A year later, in June 1936, Claudel lashed out at Francisque Gay, editor of L'Aube, accusing him of showing such bias during the strikes and occupations of the previous weeks that his paper could now virtually be considered an "organe révolutionnaire"⁴. Finally, in June and July 1939 Claudel was to engage in public controversy with Jacques Maritain, who also found himself accused of fomenting revolution, and being implicitly classed with other "livresques" and "théoriciens" such as Robespierre

1. Schwob, letter to Claudel, 4 Jan. 1933, *ibid.*, pp.166-167.
2. Letter to Schwob, 27 Jan. 1933, *ibid.*, pp.161-162.
For Schwob's further reply on 14 Feb. 1933, see *ibid.*, pp.172-174.
3. Letter to Madaule, 7 Sept. 1935, ASPC, Dossier Jacques Madaule.
See also letters to Madaule, 3 July 1934; 14 July, 29 Aug., 14 Sept., 20 Sept. 1935, all Dossier Madaule.
4. Claudel, letter to Gay, 4 June 1936, ASPC, Dossier Francisque Gay. See also, Gay, letter to Claudel, 19 June 1936, and Claudel's reply, 30 June 1936, both Dossier Gay.

or Lenin, whose relentless pursuit of ideological objectives had led to the massacre of countless innocent victims¹.

The details of Claudel's charges against these men are not of interest in themselves, since they were not rational criticisms based on real knowledge of his reluctant opponents' positions. On the contrary, as he himself would admit, they were more in the nature of angry outbursts, stemming from a general irritation with what he referred to as "toutes ces attaques contre la société de la part de gens qui n'ont à lui opposer rien de pratique et qui se bornent à semer un mécontentement général et intense"². In a sense his reaction may be compared with his mood when he saw the Church under attack in the early years of the century. The issues were reduced to black and white terms, his opponents' views were distorted and exaggerated using the classic techniques of polemic, and no distinction was made between different degrees of attack on liberal capitalism. Any criticism of the existing system by the Catholic Left could be interpreted as a call to revolution - there could be no middle ground.

1. "Question Sociale et questions sociales", Pr., p.1329, originally in Le Figaro littéraire, 24 June 1939 under the title "Attendez que l'ivraie ait mûri". In the same paper on 8 July there appeared a long letter from Maritain in reply and a further, unrepentant letter from Claudel: part of Maritain's letter and the whole of Claudel's are reprinted in Pr., pp.1572-1575. Maritain replied again in Temps présent, 14 July 1939. See also, Mauriac, "Notre Claudel", Temps présent, 30 June 1939; and Jo. II, p.276, (June 1939) where Claudel refers to the controversy aroused by his article, claiming to have received "une lettre grossière du Rév. P. Maydiou: les abbés Journet, Benon, Gratien, etc., tout le parti révolutionnaire de l'Eglise."
2. Letter to Mauriac, 2 July 1939, Dossier Mauriac. See also, letter to Madaule, 14 Sept. 1935, Dossier Madaule.

Thus, although he might not have appreciated the comparison, during this period of polarised opinions his approach in this area was very much the same, in practice, as that of General de Castelnau and others in L'Écho de Paris.

In the course of these various disputes Claudel would defend capitalism with a number of different arguments, some more substantial than others. Among the less convincing was his claim, in a letter to Schwob, that the possession of wealth was justified by the biblical text which stated that it was better to give than to receive. How could one give, he asked, "si c'est sur rien que le Seigneur a jugé bon de nous confier ce pouvoir d'intendance?"¹ This was not, of course, an entirely new idea for him: it corresponded to his earlier view that charity rather than the pursuit of economic "justice" should guide society.

Bolshevism in Russia was equated with slavery and economic failure, or, as he put it in his first attack on Maritain, "la plus épouvantable image de l'enfer qui ait jamais déshonorée le ciel et la terre"². This was also what he predicted for France in one of his letters to Gay after the Front populaire had taken power: socialisation of the economy would lead inevitably to "la socialisation des âmes"³. Capitalism, on the other hand, was defended in the same letter as being simply "le fait social de l'épargne qui est la

1. Claudel, letter to Schwob, 27 Jan. 1933, in Angel, op. cit., p.162.

2. Pr., p.1329. See also letter to Schwob, 27 Jan. 1933, in Angel, op. cit., p.162.

3. Letter to Gay, 30 June 1936, Dossier Gay.

principale garantie de l'indépendance des citoyens"¹. Or, earlier, in his second letter to Schwob, it would be described as "le régime de la famille, de la propriété privée, de la liberté de conscience"²

However, beyond these simplistic reductions there were also signs of a more reasoned position. He put it to both Schwob and Maritain that it was essential not to confuse abuses of the system with the system itself. Undoubtedly there were urgent problems which needed to be solved, but these resulted from mismanagement of a system whose basis was fundamentally sound³. Thus, he informed Maritain that there was not a Social Question but merely social questions. Instead of creating a tabula rasa in the name of an abstract ideal, it was necessary to take immediate practical steps to deal with such obvious problems as unemployment, housing, education, or alcoholism when, and only when, they could be clearly recognised and understood⁴.

So, when he was not blindly overreacting against real or imagined threats from the Left, the classic conservative gradualist in Claudel could also re-emerge. But these heated debates did not, in fact, represent the full range of his views. On the theoretical level at least, he was by no means uncritical of liberal capitalism.

1. id.

2. Letter to Schwob, 27 Jan. 1933, in Angel, op. cit., p.161.

3. See id. and Pr., p.1328.

4. id. See also, for the same idea, "Écoutez Paul Claudel", Temps présent, 4 March 1938, (report of a speech given by Claudel to the J.E.C. at the Salle Wagram on 27 Feb.).

In 1931, when the papal encyclical Quadragesimo Anno had condemned the anarchy, the plutocracy and the individualism of laissez faire capitalism alongside socialism, communism and the doctrine of class struggle, Claudel had greeted it with an enthusiasm which suggested that he saw it as confirmation of his own views. On 24 May 1931 he had commented in his diary: "L'après-midi lu avec admiration la grande encyclique du Pape contre le capitalisme et le socialisme. Quelle sévérité! quel courage! quelle force de jugement!"¹ Four days later he wrote to Agnes Meyer on the same subject:

Quel courage, quelle sévérité presque effrayante!
Ainsi il faut que la société se réforme de fond en comble -
and all the watered stocks must ooze out their unjust
juice - ce qu'ils font maintenant à en juger par la côte!
Quelle époque dramatique et intéressante! quand on ouvre le
journal chaque matin, c'est presque aussi amusant que
l'Apocalypse!²

Thus, far from abandoning his idea of movement towards a better society, he was more than ever convinced that the state of the world - and of France in particular - made widespread change an immediate necessity, though this development should not, of course, be in the direction of socialism. How then did he conceive this "crise nécessaire de renouvellement?"³

As was his habit, Claudel did not leave a comprehensive account of his theories. They have to be pieced together from fragmentary sources - correspondence, articles and interviews for the press -

1. Jo. I, p.963, 24 May 1931). For the text of the encyclical see The Social Order. Encyclical letter of Pope Pius XI: "Quadragesimo Anno", reprinted London, Catholic Truth Society, 1960.
2. Letter to Agnes Meyer, 28 May 1931, ASPC, Dossier Agnes Meyer.
3. Letter to Wladimir d'Ormesson, 13 July 1935. Dossier d'Ormesson.

most of which date from after his retirement in 1935. We are therefore obliged to think in terms of a broad outline rather than a cohesive programme. That much said, however, it is clear that his views bore a resemblance in many areas (even in their very lack of precision) to those of the new Right, the anti-liberal, anti-parliamentary ligues and other groups that were flourishing during that period. Equally, it is apparent that his thinking in this area stemmed more or less logically from the general ideas discussed in the Conversations.

The problem is, then, to assign some content to his calls for France to carry out "une redistribution un aménagement de ses ressources"¹, or "une prise de conscience intérieure, une espèce de condensation et de rationalisation de la société et de ses ressources"². One thing is absolutely certain: Claudel, a director of the massive Société des Moteurs Gnome et Rhône since 1935, was totally opposed to the nationalisation of industries. Writing in the aftermath of the elections which had brought the Front Populaire to power in May 1936, he declared:

C'est d'ailleurs un principe confirmé par toutes les expériences que l'État est un mauvais administrateur, un pitoyable patron, résumant et multipliant en lui tous les griefs que l'on fait à l'anonymat. Incompétent, inhumain, irresponsable, à la fois timide et arbitraire, tatillon et encombré, indifférent et tyrannique, gaspilleur et lâche, fermé à l'initiative, ouvert à l'abus, sensible à l'intrigue et endormi dans la commodité³.

1. Letter to Madaule, 14 July 1935, Dossier Madaule.

2. "Écoutez Paul Claudel", loc. cit. See also, Claudel, letter to Mauriac, 18 April 1935; or "Mon opinion sur les Croix de Feu", ASPC, File "Articles économiques et politiques" p.3 for other criticisms of economic individualism and pleas for immediate action.

3. "Mon opinion sur les Croix de Feu", p.5, File "Articles économiques".

Claudé's long-standing fear of "le Moloch étatique" was to remain with him¹. Nevertheless, although he was against state ownership, which was associated with the Left, he was evidently attracted to an idea currently popular with the anti-liberal Right: that of rationalising the economy². He mentioned this on several occasions, though in very general terms. In his draft article "Mon opinion sur les Croix de Feu" - a ligue whose programme was itself extremely ill-defined³ - he spoke merely of reconciling "la perspective centrale" with "les carrés individuels", and of a highly organised capitalist economy with careers open to all and appropriate rewards for merit⁴. In addition to this, he introduced a demagogic note, characteristic of the period, by calling for the future leaders of the country to do more than merely purge the

1. Claudé, letter to Gay, 30 June 1936, Dossier Gay.
2. Vague statements of principle on the need to reform the economy, purge the plutocrats, reconcile capital and labour, balance state intervention with private enterprise can be found in the programmes of most of the anti-parliamentary leagues during this period: see Jean Plumyène and Raymond Lassier, Les Fascismes français 1923 - 1963, Paris, Seuil, 1963, pp.43-44, 47-48, 53-54, 128-131, etc.
3. See Plumyène and Lassier, op. cit., pp.53-54. For a more detailed source, dating from after the league's transformation into a political party, see Le Parti Social français devant les problèmes de l'heure. (report of national congress, Dec. 1936), Paris, S.E.D.A., 1936, pp.30-48, 58-80, 238-311 (much stronger on criticism than on detailed positive proposals).
4. "Mon opinion sur les Croix de Feu", p.3, File "Articles économiques".

notorious 200 families, but to clean up the whole system from top to bottom:

Quant à la tâche qui s'impose à cette élite française, quant au nettoyage préliminaire qu'elle aura à opérer et qui ne sera pas limité à un certain nombre de familles arbitrairement choisies mais à toutes les oligarchies et à toutes les féodalités, aussi bien celle des trusts que celle des instituteurs, ce serait l'oeuvre d'un nouveau programme¹ qui pourrait s'intituler Parasitisme et arbitrage.

Claudé had, in fact, been particularly impressed by Roosevelt's New Deal for the way in which the Federal State had taken an anarchical economy in hand for the public good, protecting some areas and restricting others. He had admired its vast programmes to develop agricultural resources, and the effort to provide work for the unemployed by grouping them together in organisations such as the Conservation Corps. In his view, this was a model which France should follow with all speed². And it should also be added here that in the immediate Claudé reluctantly believed France should follow the example of the totalitarian autarchies by closing her frontiers to establish a protectionist framework within which the necessary reforms could take place³.

The idea of the planned economy could be said to correspond to

1. *ibid.*, p.6.

2. See "Le Sauvetage d'un continent", *OC* XVI, pp. 260-264 (originally in Paris-Soir, 20 Jan. 1937).

3. Letter to Paul Reynaud, 26 July 1937, ASPC, Dossier Paul Reynaud: an abridged version of this letter, as well as others from Claudé on the subject of devaluation can be found in Paul Reynaud, Mémoires, Vols. I and II, Paris, Flammarion, 1960 and 1963, pp. 410-414; 174-175. See also Claudé, letter to Madaule, 14 July 1935, Dossier Madaule.

the general conception of unity, and rational organisation compatible with individual initiative, which had been enunciated in the Conversations. Furthermore, during this period there were also more direct echoes of his interest in the organisation of industry and agriculture. With regard to the former, one of his letters to Francisque Gay contains the embryo of a theory which he was to expand after the Second World War. As an alternative to nationalisation he proposed "quelque chose comme ce que les Russes appellent l'artel" which he claimed would be in keeping with the idea of association of efforts for the common good¹.

In the Soviet Union the artel is a form of producers' co-operative normally working on state contracts with state credits². What Claudel had in mind was evidently rather different. He envisaged the establishment of autonomously financed groups "unis pour un travail déterminé" (government contracts, we might presume) and including workers, clerks, managers, directors and even financiers³. Precisely how they would be organised, structurally or economically, he did not say. Nor did he mention how he had acquired this idea, though it will be seen in a later chapter that when he expanded on this theory after the war, he acknowledged his source as Hyacinthe Dubreuil⁴, a former industrial worker turned sociologist, who was

1. Letter to Gay, 30 June 1936, Dossier Gay.

2. See Margaret Digby, The World Co-operative Movement, London, Hutchinson, revised ed. 1960, p.71.

3. Letter to Gay, 30 June 1936, Dossier Gay.

4. See below p. 325.

associated with the group of technocrats, social theorists and progressive industrialists gathered together by Jean Coutrot during the 1930s¹. At this stage, suffice it to say that Claudel seemed to be associating himself with the advanced wing of French industrial capitalism, which recognised that it had to reform itself, accept some measure of state intervention, and modernise its managerial methods if it was to survive attack from the Left.

As to the reorganisation of agriculture, it is interesting to find him recommending to Mauriac, in 1935, that communities of the type he had imagined in the Conversations should be set up in the countryside. Since writing the book he had heard of practical examples of how this could be achieved, so he now argued that young Catholics should set examples of "la cellule terrienne et sociale qui remplacera une paysannerie visiblement décadente" by taking over deserted villages and installing themselves there². Thus, in Claudel's eclectic, anti-systemic thinking, this ideal, belonging essentially to an agrarian co-operative tradition, coexisted alongside a number of ideas associated with the neo-capitalist Right.

1. For reference to Dubreuil's association with Coutrot, see Theodore Zeldin, France 1848 - 1945, Vol. II, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977, pp.1069 - 1070: this group was also interested in economic planning.

2. Letter to Mauriac, 18 April 1935, Dossier Mauriac.

D. Class Fusion and Leadership

Rationalisation of the economy and the reform of liberal capitalism were not the only watchwords which Claudel shared with the ligues. His ideal, in the Conversations, of a society in which everyone would have "le sentiment de ne pas faillir à un choeur" found an echo during the later 1930s in his call for an end to class divisions¹. In opposition to the Marxist doctrine of class struggle he appealed for a "fusion des classes" towards which Catholics should lead the way³. Beneath its up-to-date label this was not, of course, an innovation in his thinking: in reality it corresponded to the paternalistic conception of society which Claudel had held since before the First World War. This was particularly clear in an interview he gave to a journalist from Le Nouvelliste de Bretagne - Maine - Normandie - Anjou in December 1935.

Alluding to the message of Quadragesimo Anno, he had denounced the artificiality of class divisions inherited from the nineteenth century and had called for a society inspired by a spirit of comradeship, where those who had been "favorisés par des dons supérieurs" would feel duty-bound to give constant help - both practical and intellectual - to those less fortunate than themselves³. For this reason he declared himself an admirer of the ligue spirit⁴. Maintaining that the necessary

1. Pr., p.721.

2. Letter to Mauriac, 16 July 1935, Dossier Mauriac; letter to Madaule, 20 Sept. 1935, Dossier Madaule.

3. In Dominique Auvergne, "Visite à Paul Claudel", Le Nouvelliste de Bretagne - Maine-Normandie - Anjou, 18 Dec. 1935.

4. See Plumyène and Lassier, op. cit., pp.48-50, for discussion of the ideal of comradeship in the ligues.

search for unity had been the basis for the mass movements bringing the rise of Nazism, Fascism or Communism in other countries, he claimed that each nation must find its own way to social solidarity, and in the case of France the ligues were a manifestation of this spirit:

En France, il y a des groupes, des ligues. Leur idéal commun est: 'Tous unis comme au front'. On sent ce besoin aussi bien à gauche qu'à droite. A gauche et à droite, la même matière, des idées semblables qui peuvent mener à une collaboration, une entente profondes. Les catholiques doivent être, à cette union, un appui énergique ¹.

The mystique of the anciens combattants seemed to hold a particular appeal for Claudel in his quest for unity, despite, or perhaps because of the fact that he had never served in the army. And in this context we might recall that one of his early war poems, "Tant que vous voudrez, mon général" had contained the lines: "Tous frères comme des enfants tout nus, tous pareils comme des pommes./C'est dans le civil qu'on était différents, dans le rang il n'y a plus que des hommes"². Now, twenty years later, in "Mon opinion sur les Croix de Feu", he wrote glowingly of the elite of the nation, "les vrais fils de la France", drawn from all social classes, flowing spontaneously together, "comme par une pente et par un poids naturel", and rallying to a higher national ideal without thought of conventional social divisions or interests³.

1. id.

2. Po., p.533.

3. "Mon opinion sur les Croix de Feu", p.5, File "Articles économiques": it is, in fact, the main theme of the article.

It need hardly be said that Claudel did not regard the parliamentary system as a suitable framework for encouraging the development of social cohesion. However, the difference between the Claudel of 1925 and the Claudel of 1935 was that the former had evidently not seen political change as a central concern, whereas the latter now shared a widely-held belief that parliamentary democracy in France was "défunt, de nul regretté"¹. He had watched its demise in the totalitarian States without apparent sadness, commenting in his diary for May 1933 that it had failed to cater for two basic requirements of human nature: the need to command and the need to obey². The fact that, in the event, the system survived long enough in France to bring the Front populaire to power was hardly reassuring for him. Indeed, even before he learned the results of the first round of voting in April 1936 he could only lament - much as he had before 1914 - the political fate of a country which placed its whole future at the mercy of "un vote aveugle et hasardeux déterminé par le nombre, c[est]-à-d[ire] par la prééminence des éléments les plus passionnés et les moins éclairés"³.

Claudel had various ideas for what should replace the existing system, all of them tending towards authoritarian leadership above party politics. One idea which he put forward on two occasions to

1. Letter to Madaule, 14 July 1935, Dossier Madaule.

2. Jo. II, p.20, (May 1933).

3. ibid., p.141, (26 April 1936). Compare Claudel, letter to Frizeau, 14 May 1914, Corres. PC-FJ/GF, p.268, or Jo. I, p.286 (May 1914).

Jacques Madaule, and notwithstanding his ideal of class fusion, was for the bourgeoisie to take up "la tâche de dictature indispensable" rather than allow it to fall to the rabble of the Left¹. In the second letter he also emphasised that above the ruling group there should be one leader:

Je crois que les réformes qui sont à opérer en France sont si urgentes et si profondes qu'elles ne peuvent se faire autrement que par une autorité absolue et incontestée qui oblige au silence cet esprit critique si terriblement développé chez nous. Cette autorité ne peut être confiée à des mains rudes, inexpérimentées et passionnées. Je ne vois pas donc à qui elle pourrait être confiée en dehors de la classe éclairée et habituée déjà au commandement qu'on appelle la bourgeoisie (dont je reconnais les défauts). Mais au-dessus de l'équipe à constituer il faudrait un homme. J'avoue que mon séjour en Belgique m'a fait reconnaître les avantages de la monarchie².

Since this was written against a background of argument about Esprit, Claudel could have been overstating his view. Be that as it may, it is certainly true that he had been impressed by the strong character of the Belgian royal line, past and present, as well as by the Belgian form of constitutional monarchy which allowed the king to play an active part as the guardian of national interests above party politics or sectarian divisions³. On the other hand, he had also been an admirer of Roosevelt's dynamic leadership of the United States, describing him once in an interview as "l'homme d'état le plus éminent que j'ai rencontré avec le roi Albert Ier de Belgique"⁴.

1. Letter to Madaule, 14 July 1935, Dossier Madaule.

2. Letter to Madaule, 20 Sept. 1935, Dossier Madaule.

3. See Claudel, "Un Roi Franc", unpublished manuscript, ASPC, File PXIB "Contacts et circonstances: Belgique".

4. In Armand Zinsch, "Visite à Monsieur Paul Claudel", L'Indicateur républicain, 31 July 1937.

In his article on the New Deal, which appeared in Paris-Soir on 20 January 1937, he concluded that France, too, needed "un plan", "une volonté" and "un homme"; and he added: "C'est l'homme qui est le plus difficile à trouver"¹.

It seems highly unlikely that Claudel anticipated the restoration of a monarchy in France, but we may reasonably assume that any strong presidential system would have had an appeal for him. Or, in another variant he would suggest to Paul Reynaud in 1937 that the parliamentary system should be replaced by "une espèce de Sénat"².

E. Assessment of Claudel's Position

Evidently Claudel did not have a rigid notion of the precise institutional changes which should be made in the social, political and economic fields. As was his habit, he showed considerable flexibility on the question of means, so long as they seemed likely to achieve the desired end. In any case, the broad outlines were clear enough. We have seen that many of the ideas which he put forward in the 1930s were very much in vogue at that time among the various ligues and other groups of the new Right, whether neo-traditionalist or quasi-fascist. However, it should be apparent that in so far as Claudel's views coincided with theirs, they fell within the neo-traditionalist spectrum rather than the fascist.

1. "Le Sauvetage d'un continent", loc. cit.

2. Letter to Paul Reynaud, 26 July 1937, loc. cit.

It should be remembered that in the economic field his models for reorganisation were the very moderate New Deal, changes within the private firm, and the idea of voluntary co-operation, not the monolithic state capitalism of fascist ideology. As such, his conceptions in this area - vague as they were - reflected the themes in the Conversations, themselves an extension of his views before 1914, when he had already shown some awareness of the problems caused by unbridled liberal capitalism, but had rejected the radical alternative of socialism.

Similarly, his call for class fusion, echoing the ideal of social unity in the Conversations, was based on a traditional conception of charity in the Christian society, not on the subordination of all to the omnipotent state. Moreover, it was a view which accorded with the redefinitions of Catholic social doctrine outlined by Leo XIII, and more recently by Pius XI¹.

Claud el's advocacy of authoritarian leadership was also an extension of his earlier ideas. Nowhere was its traditionalistic basis more obvious than in "Mon opinion sur les Croix de Feu" where he praised Colonel de la Rocque for having rallied his men around the true values of patriotism, order, discipline, sacrifice, justice and brotherhood, "ces principes traditionnels et toujours nouveaux"².

1. See Pius XI, The Social Order (Quadragesimo Anno), London, Catholic Truth Soc., 1960, passim. (contains numerous references to Rerum Novarum).

2. "Mon opinion sur les Croix de Feu", p.5, File "Articles  conomiques". See R. R mond, La Droite en France, Vol I, pp. 218 - 225 pointing out that the Croix de Feu was not an authentically fascist group, but was neo-conservative.

Again, it is significant that the models which he admired were the strong but moderate constitutional monarchy, or perhaps the American presidency, and the class to which he looked was the bourgeoisie - at least, its more progressive elements - not to an upstart totalitarian dictatorship of déclassés.

Furthermore, although his calls for "un resserrement national intense une intensification de la conscience française" had a nationalistic ring typical of the period, his thinking had nothing in common with the fascist conception of the aggressive race-nation-state¹. Again, it was of a far more traditional nature. Claudel looked back to Jeanne d'Arc or Péguy as symbols of the same time-honoured patriotic values as have been mentioned in connection with de la Rocque². In any case, he was far from being committed to nationalism as a permanent facet of his political world-view. On the contrary, we shall see in the next chapter that he was attached to an ideal of internationalism. He merely believed, in his pragmatic way, that renewal of national identity, and economic protectionism were temporary expedients necessitated by present circumstances; notably, the rise of Germany and Italy on his country's borders.

Without pre-empting the views which will be discussed in the next chapter, it is also worth adding here that the above conclusions are reinforced by the evidence of his attitude to the internal regimes

1. Letter to Madaule, 20 Sept. 1935, Dossier Madaule.

2. See Claudel, Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher, Th. II, pp.1217-1242; "Charles Péguy", Pr., pp.538-539, (text of speech at Institut Catholique, 21 Feb. 1939).

of other countries. He was to align himself unequivocally with the nationalist cause in Spain, not only because he saw it as fighting against communist barbarism, but also because he chose to regard Franco and his forces as the guardians of order, morality, freedom, authority, property, and of course Catholicism - the traditional values of eternal Spain¹.

On the other hand, his view of the totalitarian dictatorships was very different. As we have observed, in 1933 he had not been inclined to condemn their rejection of democracy and by 1935 he still felt some sympathy with what he saw as their search for social unity, so that he could write in September of that year: "mêlées aux folies de l'Hitlérisme il y a de bonnes choses, le service du travail par exemple et tout ce qui peut amener à une fusion des classes"².

But as he learned more about the totalitarian systems, and as international tension increased, he came to lay exclusive emphasis on the vileness of these régimes, considering them all, Nazi, Fascist or Soviet, to be manifestations of the same evil process - the annihilation of the individual within a straightjacket of mechanical conformity, enslavement by the omnipotent State, and idolatry of monstrous leaders. Thus, in January 1936 he could be found lamenting the fate of these countries where "de gré ou de force ils ont lâché l'effort individuel; on voit partout s'aligner des masses

1. See, for example, Manifeste aux intellectuels espagnols (in Occident, 10 Dec. 1937) written by Claudel (see Jo. II, p.207, Oct. 1937, and letter to Wladimir d'Ormesson, 28 Oct. 1937, ASPC, Dossier Wladimir d'Ormesson), or his article "La Solidarité d'Occident," Le Figaro, 29 July 1938.

2. Letter to Madaule, 20 Sept. 1935, Dossier Madaule.

totalitaires, manoeuvrant en cadence sur une ritournelle"¹.

Or, to take another example from a long article which appeared in the NRF on 1 August 1938:

L'individu n'est plus que l'élément attelé par la contrainte à un système: encore cette image est-elle insuffisante à dépeindre l'effroyable outillage à la fois d'aspiration et de compression qui s'est constitué autour de lui, réduisant le corps à l'état de fibre et aspirant l'âme. Quand la loi de l'ensemble est ainsi posée en principe, la liberté de l'individu, l'appel de sa part à un droit personnel quelconque, est non seulement un danger, mais une absurdité et un scandale. Défense de parler, défense d'écrire, défense de savoir, défense de penser hors de la norme ².

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1. "L'Avion et la diplomatie", (first in Plein ciel, Jan. - Feb. 1936), Pr., p.1298.
 2. "Une saison en enfer", OC XVI, p.281. See also, for example, "Le Régime du bouchon" (first in NRF, 1 Sept. 1938) ibid., pp.275-278.

CHAPTER V. The Idiosyncratic Internationalist.

A. The Background

The nature of the available evidence relating to Claudel's views on foreign affairs during the inter-war years dictates a somewhat circuitous approach in this chapter. From the end of the First World War to the time of his retirement in 1935 much of the possible source material cannot be considered as reliable. Of course, his position as a diplomat meant that he was often called upon to make public statements in the form of speeches at official functions or interviews for the press. But it need hardly be said that these were always broadly in line with, and never against the policies of the Ministry. Without a wealth of supporting evidence from non-diplomatic sources - which we do not have in sufficient quantity - it is impossible to accurately assess the balance between professional zeal and personal conviction.

Meanwhile, during that same period, most of Claudel's major creative and speculative writings contained themes which extended his earlier ideal of Catholic universalism, and his desire to fit the movement of history as a whole into a Providentialist scheme of interpretation. However, the poetical or mystical contexts in which these ideas were expressed place them at such a distance from the world of international politics that they only become valuable for our purpose when they can be considered alongside other, more concrete forms of evidence - of which the years from 1918 to 1935 furnish a certain amount, but not enough.

On the other hand, between 1935 and 1940, released from most of the previous constraints on his freedom of expression, Claudel was to write a considerable number of long articles on international affairs, either looking back to the recent past, or commenting on events of the moment, or airing his thoughts on future developments. These articles will therefore be used as a basis for looking back over the disparate evidence from earlier years, assessing the political legacy that he had inherited from his professional activities, and tracing his confused reactions to the crises which preceded the outbreak of the Second World War.

To prepare the ground for discussion, a brief reminder of the broad outlines of Claudel's diplomatic work will be useful here. The bare framework may be stated in a few words. After his return from Brazil in 1919 Claudel's first posting was a short mission to Denmark as head of the French legation on the international commission charged with preparing the Schleswig plebiscite. While there, he learned of his promotion to the rank of ambassador, and in the closing months of 1921, he took up his appointment to Tokyo. There he was to remain, except when on leave, until February 1927, after which he spent six years in the prestigious post of ambassador to Washington, then, finally, two years in Brussels between 1933 and 1935.

What, for our purposes, were the crucial factors within and behind this framework? Claudel's duties in Denmark and Japan did not place him at the centre of French diplomatic activity, which was focused, during that period, on the interconnected questions of relations with Germany, the Eastern Alliances, and the quest for an

Anglo-American, or at least an English guarantee of the Versailles settlement. However, the fact that Claudel was the friend and protégé of Philippe Berthelot was to bring him into close, if relatively brief contact with these vital issues in 1925 and 1926.

Berthelot had been appointed to the key post of Secretary General at the Quai d'Orsay in September 1920, but in December of the following year he was suspended from his duties by a special disciplinary commission headed by Poincaré. The ostensible reason for this decision was Berthelot's alleged misuse of his influence in connection with a bank of which his brother was a director. Nevertheless, it was rumoured - and believed by Berthelot himself - that the real motive was Poincaré's political and personal enmity towards him. Whatever the case, it is known that Berthelot was opposed to Poincaré's views on the German question, and that he shared Briand's belief in the need for a flexible policy towards Germany.¹

In the event, with Briand forced out of power a few weeks later, and Berthelot in disgrace, Poincaré was to pursue the hard line with Germany, which led to the Ruhr occupation and, ultimately, to his own fall from power in 1924. While Poincaré was in control of foreign policy, and Berthelot removed from the scene, Claudel felt himself under threat, and at one point he believed he was going to be removed from his post.² Thus, it comes as less of a surprise that he should

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1. The information in this paragraph is drawn from Richard D. Challener, "The French Foreign Office: the Era of Philippe Berthelot", in The Diplomats, 1919-1939, (edited by G. A. Craig and F. Gilbert), Vol. I, New York, Atheneum (reprint), 1963, pp.49-86.
 2. For reference to his fear of Poincaré after Berthelot's suspension, see letter to Eve Francis, 29 June 1922, in E. Francis, Un autre Claudel, Paris, Grasset, 1973, p.201; and letter to Alexis Léger, 15 April 1924, ASPC, Dossier Alexis Léger, for reference to his recent fears that Poincaré was to have him replaced.

actually have welcomed the election of the Cartel des gauches, despite its avowed anticlericalism and its inclusion of the Socialists. Expressing this view to Elizabeth Sainte-Marie-Perrin in June 1924, he declared his immense relief at the fall of Poincaré, "cet homme néfaste", condemning the brutal rigidity and disastrous consequences of the latter's policies, while retrospectively praising Briand with the words:

Si Briand était resté au pouvoir, je ne dis pas que la question des réparations serait réglée, elle ne le sera probablement jamais, mais nous aurions sans doute obtenu le règlement de nos dettes avec l'Angleterre et peut-être avec l'Amérique, et nous aurions fait l'économie d'une crise financière tragique. Sans parler des autres âneries honteuses comme la politique séparatiste sur le Rhin ...¹

He was also anticipating that the change of government would bring "l'heure de la justice" for Berthelot² - an event which in fact occurred in April 1925, the month in which Briand took over as Foreign Minister. Thereafter, Berthelot was to remain Briand's "man" until the latter's retirement in 1932. Claudel himself was on leave in France throughout most of 1925 during the crucial negotiations leading to the signature of the Locarno Pact in October of that year. While there, he met with Briand on at least two occasions and was in relatively frequent contact with Berthelot.³

1. Letter to Elizabeth Sainte-Marie-Perrin, 5 June 1924, ASPC.

2. id.

3. See Jo. I, pp. 667, 677, for references to meetings with Briand; and ibid., pp. 667, 677, 680, 688, 703 for meetings with Berthelot.

It is known that at this time Berthelot was considering the possibility of appointing him as ambassador to Berlin.¹ Perhaps with this prospect in view Claudel drew up a long memorandum outlining his own ambitious scheme for establishing a durable Franco-German settlement which would go beyond mere diplomatic agreements by offering continuous, practical economic collaboration - and a solution to the reparations problem - through using German industrial resources to help develop the French colonies, in return for a guaranteed share in the products obtained thereby, and access to a potentially vast export market: far better, he remarked, to have "un associé encombrant et désagréable" than an angry, bankrupt debtor.² Moreover, in the early spring of 1926 Claudel gave a lengthy interview (published both in Germany and in France) in which he denounced all forms of nationalism as unchristian and called for Franco-German reconciliation as a key to "la formation des États-Unis d'Europe".³ Precisely what he had in

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1. See letter to Henri Hoppenot, 2 July 1926, in BSPC, 69, Jan.-March 1978, p.10, where Claudel refers to the possibility; and Auguste Bréal, Philippe Berthelot, p.69. According to Bréal this idea was one of Berthelot's "plus chers désirs".
 2. "Note sur la collaboration franco-allemande", (dated 13 Sept. 1925), CPC IV, p.253. This scheme was typical of the type of large-scale international project which continued to interest Claudel. In ASPC, File "Articles économiques et politiques", there are three undated rough drafts (two of them untitled) of notes which were presumably intended for the attention of his superiors. A "Note sur le Transafricain" lauds the merits of the long-standing scheme for constructing a railway network joining the whole African continent from Algeria to the Cape. Another argues for Briand to take the initiative in launching a "Locarno asiatique", and the third offers a plan for settling France's war debt to the USA by using the latter's capital in developing the French colonies in return for a large share of the profits.
 3. Reported by Étienne Garry-Paris in "Une interview de Paul Claudel", Bulletin catholique international, Nos.15-16, Aug.-Sept. 1926, p.121. A German translation of the interview had previously been published as "Ein 'Interview' Paul Claudels", in the newspaper, Germania, 10 April 1926.

mind here (always assuming that he was accurately quoted), and whether or not he was speaking entirely on his own initiative, we do not know.

It should, perhaps, be added that the rumour of Claudel's possible appointment did not arouse enthusiasm in Germany.¹ The Auswärtiges Amt naturally knew of the interview, and Solf, the German ambassador to Tokyo, had informed them of Claudel's newly-expressed enthusiasm for Franco-German collaboration.² However, this fervour for the Locarno spirit was distrusted in Berlin.³ Solf, though by then increasingly sympathetic towards Claudel, reported that before his period of leave in France, the latter had always been considered hostile to Germany, and had caused particular outrage by publishing a Japanese translation of "Sainte Geneviève" in 1923.⁴ Equally, the mayor of Hamburg reported to Berlin that before the war he had found

1. For the communication of the relevant German diplomatic documents from the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amt (hereafter abbreviated AA) I am grateful to Herr Rainer Dobbelsstein and Dr. Maria Keipert.
2. See Report no.J.821, "Rückkehr des französischen Botschaften Claudel", 19 March 1926, (AA, Po.8 Japan, IV Ja.375), where Solf recounts a long conversation in which Claudel had told him of his enthusiasm for the Locarno spirit and his belief in the need for economic collaboration.
3. All of the reasons for distrust listed in this paragraph are summarised in L.R.Grf.Bassenheim, letter to German Embassy in Washington, 23 Feb. 1927, (AA, Po.8 Inh, Gb(II Fr.1150)). For full list of diplomatic correspondence on which this letter is based, see below p.387. By the time Bassenheim's letter was written the matter was already in the past. Bassenheim reports that the Quai d'Orsay had never officially approached the German Government, but that if it had ... "Anscheinend war man sich darüber klar, dass eine Berufung Claudels nach Berlin auf ernste Schwierigkeiten gestossen wäre".
4. See report no.J.821. Solf's own view was that: "Seine Deutschfeindschaft scheint mir aber weniger einen politischen als einen kulturellen Hintergrund zu haben. Claudel ist gläubiger Katholik mit einem starken mystischen Einschlag; er ist, glaube ich, mehr Antiprotestant als antideutsch. Von diesem Gesichtspunkte aus betrachtet er auch die Angelsachsen, für die er wenig Sympathie hat."

Claudé extremely chauvinistic, and the same message came in from the former Reichskommissar on the Schleswig Commission. Moreover, a further element of doubt had been added by the fact that in 1925 Claudé had seen fit to republish both "Saint Geneviève" and the even more vitriolic "Saint Martin" in a collection of his Feuilles de saints - a fact which also attracted the hostile attention of the German press. Of the newspaper attacks on him in Germany, Claudé commented ruefully to Henri Hoppenot in July 1926: "Vous avez vu que j'ai été attaqué par les journaux allemands à propos de ma production pendant la guerre. Cependant je n'ai qu'une idée qui est la réconciliation des deux pays".¹

Be that as it may, Claudé was not appointed.² But with his posting to Washington instead, he was to become one of Briand's leading diplomatic agents at a time when the Minister was working to overcome American distrust of France by creating at least a moral link between the two Powers. Claudé would later recall that Berthelot had had increasingly little faith in Briand's policies after Locarno, whereas he, Claudé, believed they were very much to Briand's credit.³ Certainly, Claudé worked zealously for Briand's projects in America. During the early, and eminently successful part of his stay there, he was to play an important role in negotiating, and publicising the moral value (both for the world as a whole, and for Franco-American

1. Letter to Hoppenot, 2 July 1926, BSPC, 69, p.10. See also Bréal, op. cit., p.69.

2. See Claudé, letter to unnamed "Madame", (probably Frau Solf), 9 Dec. 1926, (AA, Po.9 Frankr., II Fr.1150(27)) : "Je suis très content d'être nommé à Washington, mais j'ai un certain regret pour Berlin. J'aurais été heureux de consacrer tout ce qui me reste de vie diplomatique à la grande oeuvre de rapprochement entre les deux pays."

3. See "Philippe Berthelot", (Le Figaro, 15 Jan.1937), Pr., p.1298.

understanding in particular) of the Briand-Kellogg Pact.¹ Later, in 1929, at the high point of the Briandist era, it would also fall to him to prepare American opinion for his Minister's initiative in favour of a European federation - a project on which he wrote to congratulate Briand in the most fulsome terms.² Thus, Claudel's career had reached its peak in the service of Franco-American entente, international organisation and pacification by pact.

Yet, by 1930 these euphoric days were coming to an end as the Wall Street crash led shortly to the raising of American protectionist barriers, and a corresponding wave of anti-American feeling in France. Indeed, during the early months of 1930 Claudel himself was to be the butt of attacks in L'Action française and a number of other French newspapers after one of his pro-American goodwill speeches had attracted their attention.³ In the longer term, the economic crisis

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1. For discussion of Claudel's role within the wider context of the negotiations, see, for example, Robert H. Ferrell, Peace in their Time. The Origins of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, Newhaven, Yale U.P., 1952, pp.11-12, 112, 141-144, 159-162. Ferrell remarks (p.112) that Claudel was regarded by the State Department as "easily the most astute member of the Washington ambassadorial corps". See also, Lucile Garbagnati, Paul Claudel, Ambassadeur aux États-Unis (1927-1933), D. de 3e. cycle, Besançon, 1974, for details of Claudel's numerous references to the Pact in his speeches; and CPC IV, pp.253-255, reprinting his article "La Mise 'hors la loi' de la guerre. Le point de vue français: la valeur morale du pacte", (L'Europe nouvelle, 25 March 1928).
 2. See text of his speech at West Point, (6 Sept. 1929), reprinted in CPC IV, pp.211-214: also, report no.422 (16 Sept. 1929) in Garbagnati, op. cit., pp.446-447, where Claudel reports on the speech, mentions American fears that European unity will mean an economic challenge to the USA due to increased cartelisation, and praises Briand for "la grandiose idée des États-Unis d'Europe que l'énergie infatigable et l'intelligence lumineuse de Votre Excellence ont fait entrer dans le domaine des réalisations pratiques".
 3. The reaction was provoked by a speech given at a luncheon of the Franco-American Society of New York on 8 Feb. 1930, when Claudel had praised the influence of American ideas, cinema, and products in France: see, for example, A. de Montgon, "Les Annonces faites par Claudel. Qu'en pensera Marie?", Le Petit Bleu, 11 Feb. 1930; G. de la Fouchardière, "Un ambassadeur? Un poète?", L'Oeuvre, 16 Feb.; Clément Vautel, "Mon film", Le Journal, 17 Feb.; unsigned, "Ce qu'on dit", L'Action Française, 20 Feb.

was to revive the nagging question of France's war debts to the USA. Briand himself was to retire in 1932 before the problem reached its climax. However, Claudel was still in Washington in December, when Herriot resigned his premiership after the National Assembly had refused his request to support payment of the latest instalment due under the Young Plan. It is known that Claudel had personally pressed Herriot to seek payment,¹ and that he regarded the Assembly's decision as disastrous.² Moreover, with Berthelot on the point of retirement, Herriot out of office, and control of foreign policy passing into new hands, Claudel's own days at Washington were numbered. By February 1933 he had learned that he was to be replaced - a decision which he later attributed to "une vilaine conspiration de pouvoirs"³ - and in May he took up his new post in Brussels. Of his activities in Belgium it need only be mentioned here that he was a party to important military discussions on the question of how Belgium, and hence France, should be defended in the event of German aggression.⁴

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1. See Michel Soulié, La Vie politique d'Édouard Herriot, Paris, Armand Colin, p.381; also Emmanuel Monick, (Claudel's financial attaché in Washington at the time) "Paul Claudel, diplomate et économiste", CPC IV, p.349, for remarks on Claudel's desire to see payment of the debt. Part of Claudel's diplomatic correspondence on the debts problem has been published in Documents diplomatiques français, 1ère série (1932-1935), Vol.1, July-Nov. 1932; Vol.2, Nov.1932 - March 1933, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1964, 1965, passim.
 2. See letter to Marthe Bibesco, 9 Jan. 1933, in M. Bibesco, Échanges avec Paul Claudel, nos lettres inédites, Paris, Mercure de France, 1972, p.99, where he refers to "le beau dégât commis par notre Parlement".
 3. Letter to Agnes Meyer, 21 May 1933, in CCC II, p.179.
 4. See letter to Alexis Léger, 28 March 1934, Dossier Léger, where Claudel refers at some length to discussions with Pétain during the latter's recent visit to Brussels.

B. Universalism

By the end of 1935 the great hopes of the Briandist period had long since evaporated, to be replaced by a climate of increasing international tension amid the closure of frontiers and a widespread tendency towards autarchy. Although the illusion of collective security had not yet been destroyed, the authority of the League of Nations and the credibility of the Briand-Kellogg Pact had been dented - by the failure to stem Japanese aggression in Manchuria; by the collapse of the Geneva Disarmament Conference; by Germany's withdrawal from the League; and, in the closing months of 1935, by inability to meet the challenge posed by Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. Briand's project for a European federation had been stillborn and would by now have appeared the epitome of utopian dreams to all but the tiny minority of dedicated internationalists. As to the state of Franco-American relations, the picture had scarcely been encouraging since the collapse of the scheme for a monetary and customs truce in 1933.

How did Claudel consider the state of the world which he saw around him? Before turning to discuss his reactions to the particular international crises of the later 1930s it will be helpful to examine a range of general ideas and ideals which he had come to hold by the time of his retirement. For this purpose three articles, dating from early in 1936, will serve as an initial vantage-point. They show Claudel taking stock of the international climate in the light of his past hopes, and can therefore serve as a focus around which to centre much of the evidence from his previous writings.

The first of these articles was couched in an almost mystical vein and offered a statement of faith in the idea of Europe as a living entity which was destined, one day, to form a united, organic whole. In Les Nouvelles littéraires, on 11 January 1936, Claudel asserted that beneath the "marquetric embrouillée" of national frontiers, beyond the immediate tensions of the moment, there was a European consciousness, an aspiration towards unity.¹ In all the nations of Europe, with their shared history of violent or peaceful contact, and their common heritage of Christian culture, there was, he claimed, a mutual awareness, "un état général d'alerte et de mobilisation des coeurs où chacun sent qu'il a à la fois peur et besoin de tout le monde".² Thus, even in the very friction between them he believed he could discern a reluctant but inevitable movement towards fulfilling "une nécessité pressante - un devoir profond de constituer un ensemble organique", of which the League of Nations had been an incoherent but indispensable expression.³

In the same article Claudel also maintained that the current economic crisis was only the most obvious, not the most fundamental aspect of the present "malaise international".⁴ He did not elaborate on what he considered the more basic causes to be, but his thinking becomes clearer in another article, "L'Avion et la diplomatie", which he published a few weeks later. There, he put forward a curious view of the world crisis as a psychological phenomenon manifesting a collective reaction against the consequences of progress in the field of

1. "L'Esprit européen", (written as a contribution to an enquête conducted by Georges Soria), Pr., p.1310.

2. id.

3. ibid., p.1311.

4. id.

communications. Lamenting the mood of "nationalisme exaspéré" reigning amid closed frontiers and introverted, mutually hostile nations, he observed that it was an outlook which had developed in parallel with the very factors that should have made for broader perspectives and the removal of international barriers.¹ In particular the advent of air travel and radio links had offered an invitation to wider horizons beyond national frontiers.

Yet, instead of welcoming the opportunity, the nations had retreated to their shells, following "quelque chose comme l'instinct de conservation", and jealously reasserting their individuality.² The totalitarian States could be viewed as an extreme example. In contrast to the freedom symbolised by the aeroplane - described at one point as "le messenger de l'univers"³ - these peoples had chosen enclosure and blind mechanical conformism. Given this international climate, he saw war as a possibility, with the aeroplane transformed into a terrifying instrument of destruction. Nevertheless, Claudel consoled himself: "Nemo impune contra orbem".⁴ Eventually, the world would always triumph over any aggressor.

Thus, although the two articles were couched in the most general terms, they both suggested what might broadly be described as an internationalistic ideal, and, in the latter case, a corresponding distaste for the divisive force of nationalism. Such was also the

1. "L'Avion et la diplomatie", (Plein ciel, Jan.-Feb. 1936), Pr., p.1297.

2. id.

3. ibid., p.1299.

4. ibid., p.1301.

impression conveyed by the third article, an epitaph to Briand, published in Les Nouvelles littéraires on 7 March 1936. While nationalists in France execrated the memory of Briand, Claudel showed no desire to dissociate himself from his former master. On the contrary, for him Briand was, and would remain a representative of the open spirit which was now so distressingly absent from the international scene.

Rather than adduce detailed political arguments to justify specific aspects of Briand's policies, Claudel chose the path of contrasting the harmonious climate of the Briandist period with the tensions of the present. Accordingly, he painted an enthusiastic, idealised picture of the years when Briand had held sway at Geneva, negotiating with German, British and other foreign leaders in an atmosphere of mutual confidence and respect.¹ On the other hand, the world of 1936 was viewed in terms of much the same themes as he had aired in "L'Avion et la diplomatie" - nationalism, mutual hostility, fears for the future, and "performances grotesques et forcenées" by monstrous totalitarian leaders.²

As a whole, his portrait of Briand made concessions to the sceptic and the demagogue, but depicted him above all as a man who had won a period of moral authority for France, both in Europe and America, achieving this by honourable means rather than by threat or bluff.

1. See "Briand", Pr., pp. 1270-1271; also, for example, "Le Monument d'Aristide Briand", Le Figaro, 13 Aug. 1938. Other tributes to Briand will be mentioned later in this chapter.

2. Pr., p. 1274.

"C'est vrai, il aimait la paix et il la faisait aimer", wrote Claudel.¹ And finally, Briand had been a man who believed that in Europe there was "une tradition, un héritage, le souvenir d'une culture libérale et chrétienne, une certaine habitude civilisée de vivre ensemble, un devoir de ménagement, un devoir au-dessus des biens immédiats à l'entente".² This last part of the article had, in fact, made Briand into a projection of the ideas which Claudel had expressed in "L'Esprit européen". Arguably, the description was not altogether inaccurate. But the important point is not the justice of the sketch. For our purpose the essential factor is Claudel's nostalgia for an open, expansive spirit of détente and an ideal of fruitful contact between nations, as opposed to the closed, autarchical climate of the time at which he was writing. Also, we have further indications of his particular attachment to the conception of Europe as a living entity with a duty to move towards some form of organic solidarity.

What earlier evidence can be added to flesh out these articles? Firstly, it is worth noting that the words nationalisme and nationaliste had figured in Claudel's vocabulary with pejorative connotations since the very early years after the war. Referring to the nationalistic Right in France these terms had appeared synonymous with narrowness of views and lack of idealism. When he scathingly remarked on the blinkered mentality of the Bloc national after the elections of 1919, his derogatory comment had included the fact that the Bloc was "férocement et étroitement nationaliste et attaché à ses intérêts".³ Almost the same

1. ibid., p. 1273.

2. ibid., pp. 1273-1274.

3. Jo. I, pp. 462-463, (Dec. 1919).

words were used when he wrote to Elizabeth Sainte-Marie-Perrin in June 1924, hailing the fall of the Bloc and the end of its disastrous foreign policies.¹ Or again it is worth mentioning a letter which he wrote to Duhamel in 1931 criticising the latter's representation of America in his Scènes de la vie future. Whilst Claudel admitted to sharing some of Duhamel's criticisms of the American way of life he argued that the book showed a lack of balance and catered to the chauvinistic instincts of its readers. In the past, he maintained, Duhamel had always tried to cure his compatriots of their "esprit hargneux et exclusif", but of the present work (which of course did nothing to help his own task in Washington) he concluded:

Je vous dirai ce que vous pouvez entendre de plus dur en vous disant que votre livre est un livre nationaliste dans le plus mauvais sens du mot, qui par lui-même est hideux. Les affreuses éloges de Massis et des scélérats de l'A. F. ont dû vous faire rougir.²

On a more general note it is also worth pointing out that Claudel's diary for September 1924 contains quotations from the moral philosopher, Wladimir Solovyev, condemning nationalism as a form of collective egoism or idolatry which had led nations to adore their own image rather than God, the universal.³ These were, in fact, the arguments which he expanded in his interview with Étienne Garry-Paris in 1926. He had defined nationalism as "l'amour idolâtre de la patrie" in opposition to patriotism, which meant love of one's country without belief in its omnipotence or self-sufficiency.⁴

1. Letter to Elizabeth Sainte-Marie-Perrin, 5 June 1924, ASPC.

2. Letter to Duhamel, 21 March 1931, Dossier Duhamel.

3. See Jo.I, p.645, (Sept.1924) .

4. É. Garry-Paris, "Une interview de Paul Claudel", op. cit., p.121.

Moreover, he had emphasised his belief that the spirit of Catholicism was an invitation to brotherhood of all mankind "dans la chrétienne égalité" and that each nation had a vocation to fulfill within the universal communion.¹ Taking up these views again in the Conversations he had formulated them in terms of his theory of complementary differences:

Fondamentalement les hommes sont les mêmes partout, ils sont tous des enfants d'un même Père, comme nous l'apprend le catéchisme et je suppose que vous êtes gêné et dégoûté autant que moi par les idées de supériorité et d'infériorité. Mais de même qu'ils n'ont pas été faits pour dire la même chose ils ont, suivant la localisation qui leur a été répartie, à fournir expression à des choses² différentes, non pas contradictoires mais complémentaires.

However, Claudel's contempt for nationalism and his ideal of Christian brotherhood still left ample scope for ambiguity. In his diary for April 1920 appears the cryptic remark: "Nationalisme et démocratie, jumeaux également détestables".³ His coupling of nationalism with democracy on this occasion serves a reminder of another, earlier comment in his diary, where he had expressed his reservations concerning the principle of democratic self-determination propounded by Woodrow Wilson. Among his notes for April 1918 were the words:

Le Principe des nationalités poussé à l'extrême, c'est le régime du divorce transporté du domaine de la famille dans celui de la nation. La volonté momentanée d'une majorité plus ou moins éclairée ne suffit pas à

1. id.

2. Pr., p.784.

3. Jo.I, p.477, (April 1920).

abolir le passé et à engager l'avenir. - La liberté d'un peuple cesse là où le danger d'un autre commence. Ex. l'Irlande. Lui accorder l'indépendance complète serait pour l'Angleterre une folie. - Il est amusant de voir l'Amérique se faire le champion du droit des peuples à disposer d'eux-mêmes quand on se rappelle la Guerre de Sécession qui fut la négation (parfaitement justifiée) de ce principe, contre l'unanimité des États du Sud qui voulait (sic) se détacher de l'Union.¹

The suggestion was that the political realist in Claudel saw the principle of national self-determination as disruptive and irrational if applied on a large scale. Thus, it is interesting to observe that he subsequently showed very little sympathy for the nationalist movements in colonial countries. For example, an article which he wrote after a visit to Indo-China in 1921 drew a flattering contrast between the political acquiescence which he claimed to exist in Indo-China and the nationalist upheavals in Egypt, India or other parts of the East. In the course of his long eulogy of the cultural, economic and political benefits of French colonial rule in Indo-China, he rejoiced that the force of nationalism there was "presque éteint", and argued that even extremists there had learnt from the tragic example of chaos now reigning in China that the benefits of association with France far outweighed the trivial "satisfactions d'amour-propre" to be gained from independence.² Furthermore, he expressed his hope that France would now consolidate her influence in the Far East and play an increasing role in overseeing the fate of Asia as a whole.³

1. *ibid.*, p.402, (April 1918).

2. "Mon voyage en Indochine", (Revue du Pacifique, May 1922), OC IV, p.341.

3. See *ibid.*, p.344.

Whether or not the writing of this article may have been influenced by professional considerations relating to Claudel's position as ambassador to Tokyo, there is no reason to doubt that his statements were sincere. Although he had appeared critical of the rigid assimilationist policies pursued in Indo-China at the time when he wrote the first draft of Sous le signe in 1905, he had wanted to see French influence consolidated in the region as a whole. Since that time, new, more flexible policies had in any case been introduced and carried out with considerable success, so there was even less reason for Claudel to feel sympathy for the force of nationalism there.¹ Moreover, it is also significant that he should have referred with horror to the fate of China. Although his attitude to the impact of European influence there before 1911 had not been without its contradictions, the one thing he had evidently not wanted to see was the emergence of an agitated, revolutionary society dominated by the nationalist movement. In 1930 he was to be found writing to Dom Édouard Neut - a leading missionary who was sympathetic to the Chinese nationalists - in vigorous defence of the order brought by the West to an Asiatic race whose character made it likely that they would otherwise be plunged indefinitely into anarchy.²

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1. See Roberts, History of French Colonial Policy, pp.471-498, for discussion of the changes towards associationist policies and mise en valeur in Indo-China from 1911 onwards. For a later enthusiastic set of remarks by Claudel on France's bond with Indo-China, see "Lettre-préface sur l'Annam", (first in Tran-Van-Tung, "L'Annam. Pays du rêve et de la poésie", Paris, 1945), OC IV, pp.385-386. His reactions to decolonisation after the Second World War are discussed below pp.360-362.
 2. See letters to Dom Édouard Neut, 6 Dec. 1929 and 11 Jan. 1930, these letters were later published in La Politique de Pékin, 6 Dec. 1930 and 19 Dec. 1931. For a left-wing attack on Claudel regarding the first of these letters (which had, it seems, received wide publicity in France), see Jean Longuet, "L'Ambassadeur Claudel contre le peuple chinois", Le Soir, 1 May 1931.

In practice, then, Claudel's theoretical rejection of any idea of innate superiority or inferiority did not mean that he was now committed to the political equality of all nations, or to the right to democratic self-determination, any more than he was attached to the principle of democracy per se. Thus, he had been quite prepared to see the continued subjection of some nations to others under the auspices of benign colonial rule. In this respect, of course, he was by no means unusual among his compatriots, Catholic or non-Catholic, democratic or non-democratic, nationalist or internationalist, for opposition to colonialism was as yet the almost exclusive property of the Marxist Left. However, it is as well to observe at this point that in Claudel's case preparedness to countenance imperialism did not apply solely to Western hegemony over the underdeveloped countries of what we now call the Third World. In April 1918 he had mentioned Ireland - a Catholic, European country - when expressing his wariness of the principle of self-determination. We shall see in due course that his willingness to accept the subjection of other small European nations was to demonstrate the peculiarly flexible and idiosyncratic character of his internationalism during the late 1930s.

To return to the articles which served as our starting-point what of his general ideal of closer contact between nations? And what of his former belief that "l'accélération des communications allait dilater les nations?"¹

The theme of breaking down barriers between nations can be seen in various guises running through all of Claudel's major creative and

1. "Briand", Pr., p.1273.

speculative works during the 1920s, linked with the ideal of a world spiritually united in Catholicism. Obviously it is out of the question to examine them all in detail here, but a number of observations need to be made if we are to understand the idiosyncracies of his political writings in later years.

Perhaps the most striking feature of these works was Claudel's ability to see all paths as leading towards unity, through love or hatred, peace or war, partnership or domination. Between 1919 and 1924 Claudel was intermittently engaged in writing Le Soulier de satin, the vast summa of his dramatic works. But during the last months of 1920 he broke off to write a long ode to the memory of Dante. In the course of this poem he had lyrically evoked Dante's dream of universal unity in peace under a worldwide Holy Roman Empire - "Le mariage à l'ombre de la Croix de toutes les nations avec Rome", guided by "un Empereur visible".¹ This world, then, would offer "un recours contre le particulier", for each individual would be bound in a harmonious "contrat avec tous les hommes".²

However, in Le Soulier, where the action takes place in a world not already united in Catholicism, he would show equal enthusiasm in evoking the destruction of spiritual and temporal barriers by violent means. Set in what Claudel regarded as the heroic age of Catholicism, the Counter-Reformation,³ the theme of "la réunion de la terre" is

1. Po., p.679.

2. id.

3. For Claudel's admiration of this period, see Frédéric Lefèvre, "Une heure avec Paul Claudel retour d'Amérique", (interview), Les Nouvelles littéraires, 7 May 1927; also, Claudel's words quoted by Henry Daniel-Rops in "Claudel, tel que je l'ai connu", Les Oeuvres libres, No.110, June 1956, pp.17-18.

enacted against a background containing plentiful reminders of the martial Claudel of 1914.¹ As Spain and her Catholic allies are shown battling against the divisive forces of heresy in Europe,² fighting the Moslem "Légions de Satan" (who have attempted to enclose North Africa behind "remparts de fer"),³ establishing contact with Asia,⁴ and forcibly opening up the Americas, the drama abounds in triumphal references to conquest, where the cross and the will to empire go hand in hand.⁵

The play also contains a less developed idea (to which we shall return later) that after war can come closer reconciliation in peace, specifically related to Europe. However, the fact that Claudel could portray this violent period of history with such gusto hardly suggested that the experience of the First World War had left him with an utter revulsion against armed conflict. This impression is reinforced in

1. The idea of accomplishing "la réunion de la terre" is voiced by an angel when designating the central figure, Don Rodrigue, as the successor to Columbus, Th. II, p.824. See also, in particular, Rodrigue's speeches in ibid., pp.919-920, where he elaborates on the themes: "Je suis venu pour élargir la terre", and "Tous les murs qui s'écartent, c'est comme la conscience qui s'élargit ...". This is, of course, a central theme of Christophe Colomb (1927) as well.
2. For reference to Protestantism as a force of separation, see, for example, ibid., p.749;
3. ibid., p.741.
4. See ibid., p.871, for Rodrigue's explanation of why he came to Japan (where he has fought and been captured): "C'est parce que je suis un homme catholique, c'est pour que toutes les parties de l'humanité soient réunies et qu'il n'y ait aucune qui se croit le droit de vivre dans son hérésie/Séparée de toutes les autres comme si elles n'en avaient pas besoin".
5. See, for example, ibid., pp.729, 786. For a fairly detailed discussion of the Claudelian justification of violence in Le Soulier, see Marianne Mercier-Campiche, Le Théâtre de Paul Claudel ou la puissance du grief et de la passion, Paris, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1968, pp.228-241.

the Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher where the universalistic themes of his earlier works are transposed into a reverie on the future of mankind.

The first appearance of these themes was in "Dimanche", written during the summer of 1927 before Claudel took up his appointment to Washington. The subject was raised in passing, as an extension of debate on whether society should ideally exist in a state of permanent tranquillity, or whether it in fact derived vitality and dynamism from an element of conflict or risk. In this context, similarly, he was prepared to offer a justification, or at least an explanation of war as a paradoxically creative phenomenon:

Il y a beaucoup à dire pour la guerre. Il faut croire que ça sert tout de même à quelque chose pour qu'on n'ait jamais pu s'en passer. C'est la guerre qui a fait l'Europe et qui nous a obligés à prendre l'un à l'autre cet intérêt poignant. C'est la guerre qui nous a appris à aimer ce qui n'est pas à nous et à compter pour rien ce que nous possédons. C'est la guerre qui établit entre les hommes d'autres rapports que ceux de l'argent. C'est elle seule qui fait sortir de nous du nouveau et de l'inouï. Que la trompette sonne et tout est oublié. On est des frères, on s'en va mourir pour quelque chose!¹

Again Claudel had recaptured the martial tones of the arrière. Moreover, conflict was endowed with a positive value in breaking down barriers and creating a certain bond of awareness between the adversaries. It would be a mistake to dismiss this as a piece of vulgar bravado. On the one hand, it offers a reminder that during the First World War the jingoist poet in Claudel had coexisted alongside the man who was hoping to see closer contacts between nations when peace returned. It also goes

1. Pr., p.722.

towards explaining why, in January 1936, he could still claim to discern the development of a European consciousness beneath the tensions and hatreds of the moment.

Characteristically, in "Dimanche" Claudel's explanation of war leads directly to the dream of closer reconciliation in peace. Thus, he suggested that, whether or not there might be other wars in the future, it seemed that for the present mankind had been mysteriously called to join in "une innombrable entente".¹ The wars of the past had, as it were, created "un immense terre-plein" on which the time had come to build.² This theme was later to be expanded in the euphoric "Samedi" (the last section of the book), written in Washington while Claudel was engaged in the negotiations for the Briand-Kellogg Pact.

"Samedi" is, in fact, a utopian vision of what Claudel later described as "la transformation de la terre entière en un seul jardin ou paradis"³ - a world in which all men would be united in concerted effort towards a common goal. "Pour réunir l'Humanité", he proclaimed, "il faut une oeuvre commune. Achéons le monde."⁴ Indeed, he argued that mankind had received a Providential command. Despite the ugliness of some of its immediate effects, he saw technological advance - the vast potential of the machine and its labour-saving capacity - giving man the ability to master the forces of nature, to study them and mould them to his purpose. There were also reminders of

1. *ibid.*, p.723.

2. *id.*

3. Preface to the 1935 edition of the Conversations, Pr., p.668.

4. *ibid.*, p.796.

his interest in communications. Anticipating the ideas in "L'Avion et la diplomatie", he declared:

L'auto nous a donné la possession de la terre, l'avion donne la domination de la planète, ... nous ne subissons plus la circonstance, nous dominons un texte, nous nous promenons sur une astronomie.¹

After an era of exploration by land, the advent of air travel had at last added the final dimension to man's potential knowledge of his environment, so that the world could now be linked, and hence united, in all its parts.²

This vista of unity in mastery over, and beautification of the material world was naturally accompanied by the idea of spiritual fulfilment. Claudel was prepared to suggest that Providence was even now opening the way for the triumph of Catholicism by bringing the progressive collapse of all philosophies and beliefs standing in its way. The communion of all mankind in peace would also mean communion of man with God and with the whole of Creation. He could thus imagine the glorious destiny of "ces hommes futurs qui pourront réunir en eux trois choses: la Foi, le Pouvoir et cette joie intrépide qui bientôt transportera les montagnes".³

We do not have to suppose that Claudel believed this was to be the inevitable pattern of the future. The crucial point is that he could dream of a world in which unity would be coupled with spiritual and material fulfilment. Indeed, it is interesting and somewhat ironic

1. *ibid.*, p.781.

2. See *ibid.*, p.797.

3. *ibid.*, p.810.

that his future millenium represented a meeting between the notion of unus populus christianus, so dear to medieval Catholicism, and the nineteenth-century myth of material progress, as propagated by partisans of the scientistic humanism which Claudel had so vigorously attacked in the past.

That he had no absolute faith in this utopia was to be made evident almost immediately. At the end of 1928 or early in 1929 he had begun to write his Au milieu des vitraux de l'Apocalypse, an exegesis of Revelations and various other prophecies, the final version of which he completed in 1932. As was mentioned in the last chapter, the tone of this work was often extremely harsh. Viewing humanity through the perspective of these biblical texts, Claudel, like the God of the Old Testament, sat in stern judgement, placing emphasis throughout most of the book on man's repeated revolt against his Creator throughout history.¹

The sections which looked towards the future presented a picture of considerable confusion as Claudel attempted to bring together and interpret a large number of enigmatic, often mutually contradictory prophecies, relating to the destination of mankind up to the Last Judgement. In this tortuous "chemin de propositions et de conjectures",² his problem was to reconcile prophecies which appeared to suggest a universal triumph of the Church during the last days of history with others which anticipated the reign of the Antichrist. However, the factor which was common to all of his conjectures was the belief that mankind was destined to move towards unity.

1. For discussion, see, for example, Jacques Petit, "L'Histoire dans la lumière de l'Apocalypse", Revue des lettres modernes, 150-152, 1967(I), pp. 83-100.

2. OC XXVI, p.222.

In one chapter, where he claimed that the end of history was "encore éloigné mais non pas à perte de vue", he argued that although the unification of the Earth was still in its early stages, it was now taking place with increasing rapidity as the pace of history accelerated.¹ At some stage in the future he predicted an immense, unspecified catastrophe for "la civilisation matérialiste",² but looking further ahead to the Last Days he saw a world which would not only have abandoned all spiritual resistance to God, but would also be physically united:

Toute la terre est devenue praticable. Tous les lieux sont réunis par des rubans de fer et de ciment. Tous les pays communiquent. . . L'oeuvre de Saint Jean-Baptiste a été parachevée. Il y a des ponts sur tous les fleuves, il y a des rampes et des tunnels au travers de toutes les montagnes, l'air même est sillonné de flèches fulgurantes ...³

Here, then, the final vision closely resembles that of "Samedi". Equally, in a subsequent chapter, he invented an interlocutor to put forward, on the basis of several prophecies, his idea that the world might ultimately see an end to all false beliefs, an end to all tyrannies, and a triumph of Catholicism - "la paix sur une terre habitée et accessible d'un bout à l'autre dans toutes ses parties".⁴ In this perspective, drawing on the words of St. Paul, the end of history would be reached when the Jews were reconciled with the Gentiles in Christianity.⁵ Again, no time scale was offered for this development, but Claudel claimed that he could discern factors suggesting

1. *ibid.*, p.223.

2. *id.*

3. *ibid.*, p.224.

4. *ibid.*, p.248.

5. *ibid.*, pp.248-249.

that the path was already opening towards all these future glories.¹

However, this interpretation was contradicted by the more pessimistic "Je", who argued that there could be no millenium in a world irrevocably tainted by original sin. He clung to the conviction that "le fait essentiel de toute l'histoire c'est toutes les barrières l'une après l'autre qui se rompent et l'humanité par toutes sortes de liens qui se réunit" (my italics).² But he now predicted that, spiritually, humanity was moving towards unity in materialistic refusal of God. And at some stage in this process - following his new interpretation of the prophecy relating to Gog and Magog - he foresaw a period of vast material and spiritual strife, connected in some way with Soviet Russia and the spread of international communism.³ Obviously, when faced with the vast question of divining the long-term future in the light of the Scriptures, Claudel had not committed himself to any definitive conclusion. Nevertheless, amid its confusions Au milieu des vitraux exhibits much the same basic elements as we have seen recurring in his other works during the 1920s.

Finally, it remains to emphasise one more point arising from the articles - the special place occupied by Europe within Claudel's universalistic perspective. The question may be mentioned fairly briefly. Suffice it to point out that in Le Soulier the idea that

1. See *ibid.*, p.250.

2. *ibid.*, p.259.

3. See *ibid.*, p.259-263; also, letter to René Schwob, 24 Dec. 1929, in P. Angel, *op.cit.*, p.151, and Jo.II, pp.160-161, (Nov. 1936), for further references to this idea.

war should be followed by closer reconciliation in peace had been applied particularly to Europe, Protestant nations as well as Catholic, in a curious poetical transformation of the politico-economic proposals which he had outlined in the first draft of Sous le signe for the imperialist Powers to curb their rivalry and jointly administer China. Thus, in the last act of the play, Don Rodrigue, the central figure, not only appeals to the King of Spain to make peace with England - a kiss of peace after the fierce embrace of war - but also demands that he should share the Americas with all the nations of Europe so that they may at least be united "en un seul courant" in the New World if not in the Old.¹

When he gave his interview to Étienne Garry-Paris in 1926 calling for "la formation des États-Unis d'Europe", Claudel had declared at one point that "ce petit navire Europe porte avec lui le destin du monde. Le monde est né de l'Europe. C'est en elle que se trouve son cerveau et son coeur".² A similar idea of Europe - the traditional home of Christian civilisation - as the real heart of the world was also to appear in "Samedi" within the wider framework of comment on the complementary vocations of different races or nations. Although he had professed his belief that all were innately equal, his thinking appeared more ethnocentric than he may have realised.

On one side of Europe Claudel pictured the Asiatic world (to which he partially assimilated Russia on this occasion) as providing

1. Th. II, p.932.

2. É. Garry-Paris, "Une interview de Paul Claudel", op. cit., P.121.

a necessary element of fixity or continuity for mankind. Its geography, its art forms, its customs, its religions, its social and economic traditions, even its wars and revolutions were taken deterministically to illustrate an underlying changelessness and immobility.¹ On the other side, America was characterised by vitality, movement and leadership in the field of material progress, but was viewed as spiritually insubstantial and morally empty.² Sandwiched between the two lay Europe, whom he called to take stock of herself as a living, united body, and to assume her historic role of moral and spiritual leadership for which the rest of the world was waiting. Thus, there was "une nouvelle conscience à prendre d'elle-même, ces parties disjointes dont on s'aperçoit qu'elles sont des membres solidaires, il y a une nouvelle forme à réaliser, un nouvel effort vers le sens commun".³

This, then, was the ideal of which we have seen the later reflection in "L'Esprit européen" and "Briand". In the light of this conception, and others discussed earlier in this section, there is every reason to believe that he was sincere when he wrote to Briand in 1929 expressing his immense pride that France should now be taking the lead in initiating the federal organisation of Europe⁴. Nor should we doubt the strength of his conviction in a speech which

1. See Pr., pp.784-789.

2. See ibid., pp.789-790; also, letter to Stanislas Fumet, 2 Jan. 1924, in BSPC, 57, July-Sept. 1975, pp.11-12.

3. ibid., p.788.

4. See report no.422, 16 Sept. 1929, in Garbagnati, op.cit., pp.446-447.

he made in March 1932 (after the failure of the project for European unity, and after Briand's retirement) stating his continued faith that sooner or later Briand's dream would be fulfilled in the organisation of a true European commonwealth with the motto "Une et Indivisible - Libre et Unie".¹ It seems highly unlikely that by 1936 he entertained any hopes of its accomplishment in the foreseeable future. However, an examination of his reactions to the crises of the late 1930s will show how, after a period of intense confusion and disarray, the very eve of war would find him optimistically speculating again on the possibilities of future European unity.

C. The Crises (1)

Ethiopia, the Rhineland, Spain, the Anschluss, Munich: with hindsight we are able to see these crises as steps in the progressive demolition of peace in Europe. But obviously that is not how they appeared to most observers at the time. There was always the hope that the era of surprises might really be over after each new aggression. There were always plausible reasons to justify inaction by the democracies. The hesitations, the contradictions and the illusions underlying Claudel's reactions to these issues reflect much of the anguished uncertainty which permeated French society as a whole.

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935 had not only raised difficult moral problems concerning the nature of colonialism,

1. Speech to the Franco-American Society of Chicago, 18 March 1932, in Garbagnati, op. cit. p.614.

but had also posed the first challenge by a European Power to the principle and effectiveness of collective security. In the absence of a clear lead from the Vatican, Catholic intellectuals in France tended to divide along ideological lines. In general, the moderate and the extreme Right had rallied to the manifesto launched by Henri Massis under the title Pour la défense de l'Occident et la paix en Europe, affirming support for Mussolini's civilising mission to the primitives, condemning the hypocrisy of colonialist Britain, and denouncing the putative League sanctions as likely to cause war in Europe. The extreme Left, on the other hand, had launched a counter-manifesto, calling for a strong line against Italy. In between the two sides a median position was represented by the Manifeste pour la Justice et la Paix, launched by La Vie catholique, and mainly grouping the left-of-centre démocrates chrétiens, who had in the past been among Briand's strongest supporters. The view taken in this case was somewhat self-contradictory, for it argued that while Mussolini's inhumane actions were to be condemned, the conflict should not be internationalised at any cost. Similarly, the doctrine of racial inequality was condemned, but benign colonial development supported. In practical terms the manifesto had nothing constructive to offer. It could only take a moral stand, and weakly conclude that the League could only fulfil its purpose if all nations truly wished for peace and justice.¹

1. For discussion of the climate of opinion, and details of the manifestoes, see René Rémond, Les Catholiques, le communisme et les crises, 1929-1939, Paris, Armand Colin, 1930, pp.91-122.

Where had Claudel stood on this question? As far as his views on home affairs were concerned, he was a long way to the right of the Christian Democrats, let alone the Catholic extreme Left. But in the past he had been deeply divided from the Massis-Action Française nationalist grouping precisely by his association with Briandist policies. Indeed, he had recently been savagely attacked in L'Action française at the time when he had been defeated in the elections to the Académie Française in March of that year.¹ He had previously declared his contempt for racialism and would later be an outspoken opponent of Hitler's antisemitic policies.² But, as we have seen earlier, he was by no means an enemy of benign colonial development. As early as June 1935 his diary had contained the comment: "L'Italie et l'Éthiopie. La vigne de Naboth."³ The Biblical reference suggested moral condemnation. Moreover, he later wrote to Mgr. Baudrillart, his former confessor, to reproach him for signing the odious Maurrassian manifesto in support of Mussolini.⁴ But it is also evident that by September, as international tension increased, he had shared the widespread fear that drastic League sanctions would lead to a general conflagration. He wrote to Wladimir d'Ormesson on the 21st of that month:

1. For attacks on Claudel and his former links with Briand, made during the early months of 1935, around the time of the Académie Française elections, for which Claudel had been a candidate, see L'Action française, 14 Feb.; 29 March; 30 March; 3 April 1935. For discussion of the election and the controversial rejection of Claudel in favour of Claude Farrère (a sympathiser of the Action Française group), see Urbain Blanchet, "Paul Claudel et Georges Duhamel, Correspondance relative à l'Académie Française", Claudel Studies, I(3), 1973, pp.39-62.
2. For his protests against antisemitism in Germany, see, for example, letter to the Jewish World Congress, May 1936, in Les Juifs, (edited by H. Daniel-Rops), Paris, Plon, 1937, pp.5-6; open letter in Temps présent, 11 March 1938; Georges Cattani, "Paul Claudel regarde le monde", (interview), Temps présent, 5 May 1939.
3. Jo.II, p.96, (June 1935).
4. See *ibid.*, p.110, (8 Oct. 1935) for reference to his reproaches in this letter; also *ibid.* p.117, (Dec. 1935), for disgust at Italian atrocities.

Comme tout le monde je suis avec horreur et angoisse le récit de négociations que nous apportent les journaux où il ne s'agit de rien moins qu'éventuellement de la mort de millions d'hommes grâce à la folie et à l'obstination de quelques hommes. Deus avertat! Verrons-nous la Ligue des Nations créée pour éviter les conflits leur donner une gravité et une universalité qu'ils n'auraient pas eues sans elle?¹

Claudé had thus been caught in one of the tragic contradictions of the period - unwillingness to recognise that collective security could only exist if it was vigorously enforced by economic or military action when confronted by a defiant nation engaged in aggression against another member, even if that member was an underdeveloped country. Yet his disgust for the Italian action was none the less genuine. He was, in fact, to be among the first signatories of the Manifeste pour la Justice et la Paix, which seems to have answered almost exactly to his confused position.²

In March 1936 a further blow was dealt to the crumbling Briandist edifice when Hitler carried out his remilitarisation of the Rhineland in defiance of the Locarno agreements. Our only record of Claudé's immediate reaction is contained in his diary where he merely noted that the event had occurred, and added: "Menaces comiques et vides de Sarraut".³ Whether he would have wished to see France attempt a counter-occupation is not known, but it seems unlikely since he undoubtedly underestimated the extent of the potential threat from Germany.

1. Letter to d'Ormesson, 21 Sept. 1935, Dossier d'Ormesson.

2. See Le Figaro, 20 Oct. 1935, where Claudé's name is announced among the "premières adhésions".

3. Jo.II, p.131, (8 March 1936).

This was to be illustrated with particular clarity a few months later when he wrote an article for Paris-Soir, where he declared that a surprise attack from Germany was not only improbable, but would in any case be doomed to failure. In this particular article, and in references to the question on other occasions, he was to show an absolute faith in the Maginot Line and the continuous front theory. It was a subject on which he evidently considered himself to be well qualified to pronounce since, while serving in Brussels, he had been a party to high-level military discussions with Pétain on the question of how France and Belgium should be defended against a possible invasion from the east.¹ Now, believing the Maginot Line to be impregnable, and sharing Pétain's conviction that the Ardennes were virtually impassable, he argued that the strategic problems of invading France - even with motorised divisions - through the narrow northern gap would surely suffice to deter Hitler from what could only be self-destruction.²

Moreover, during the second half of 1936 and the early part of 1937 Claudel had other reasons for hoping that international equilibrium could be restored by pacific means. From June 1936, or probably earlier, France was engaged in secret negotiations with America and Britain to reach a monetary agreement intended to establish a durable

1. See letter to Léger, 23 March 1934, Dossier Léger.

2. All of the above paragraph is drawn from "L'Attaque brusquée est-elle possible?", (Paris-Soir, 9 Oct. 1936), CPC IV, pp.257-260. See also, "Sur les ruines du traité de Versailles", (Paris-Soir, 8 March 1937), CPC IV, p.273, where he writes that "la France pour la première fois dans l'histoire jouit d'une situation inexpugnable"; and "La Banquette avant et la banquette arrière", (no date or record of publication), Pr., p.1313.

balance between their currencies, and to set an example of collaboration, which would help to stabilise the international climate. Among the negotiators on the French side was Emmanuel Monick - formerly Claudel's financial attaché in Washington - who had hopes that the agreement would serve as the first step to economic entente in other areas, which in turn would be a basis for establishing closer political contact between the three Powers.¹

Claudé was kept informed by Monick, and believed that the pact - eventually signed in September 1936 - would be of immense importance. He had long thought that France should align herself with America and Britain in abandoning the gold standard.² Furthermore, in a wider sense, his view remained much as it had been in February 1933, when he had written to Herriot: "Une entente de la France avec l'Amérique, conditionnant une autre entente avec l'Angleterre est la condition indispensable du relèvement du monde."³ This, he had claimed, would constitute "l'avertissement nécessaire aux puissances impérialistes".⁴ He was, in fact, to put forward similar arguments to Herriot in May 1936. Suggesting that the time might now be propitious for settling the unresolved problem of war debts, which had hitherto been a barrier to Franco-American rapprochement, he continued:

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1. See J. Néré, The Foreign Policy of France from 1914 to 1945, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, pp.200-202. Further background communicated to me by M. Monick during an interview in April 1973.
 2. See letters to Paul Reynaud, 17 Jan., 19 Feb., 2 March 1934, 6 Feb. 1935 in Reynaud, Mémoires I, pp.411-414.
 3. Letter to Édouard Herriot, 17 Feb. 1933, in É. Herriot, Jadis, Vol.II, Paris, Flammarion, 1952, pp.361-362.
 4. *id.*

Loïn de nous appauvrir, une entente économique avec les États-Unis qui nous servirait de base et de levier pour une autre avec l'Angleterre serait le meilleur instrument de la reprise des affaires. Franklin Roosevelt est toujours là. Et je ne parle pas de la force politique que nous acquerions, si l'on sentait l'Amérique derrière nous et les trois grandes puissances libérales, groupant derrière elles toute l'Europe démocratique, étroitement unies.¹

Later, in June, Claudel's diary records that he and Monick visited Herriot to outline "tout un plan" - no doubt including Monick's scheme for stabilising the international economy by basing currency partly on raw materials and forming international companies to regularise the markets in those materials.² Equally, in several articles for Paris-Soir, during the months before and immediately after the signature of the Tripartite Monetary Pact, Claudel mounted his own effort to influence public opinion in favour of the United States.

Painting a nostalgic picture of Franco-American goodwill during the early part of his stay in Washington, he payed his usual tribute to Briand before describing how the debts question had poisoned relations between the two countries after 1929. Without totally exonerating the Americans for their part in the wrangle, or tactlessly vilifying the French politicians responsible, he traced a distressing chapter of errors, in which France had consistently

1. Letter to Herriot, 23 May 1936, ASPC, Dossier Édouard Herriot.

2. Jo.II, p.146, (4 June 1936). See also *ibid.*, pp.147; 148; 156 for further brief references to Monick's activities during this period.

missed every chance to reach an honourable and economically feasible arrangement.¹ However, he did not content himself with airing the mistakes of the past, stressing the danger of isolation, praising Roosevelt and the American people, or emphasising the importance of the Monetary Pact once it had been signed.² In one article he also offered a possible solution to the debts problem, based on the idea of following Germany's earlier example of using her position as a debtor to her own, as well as her creditor's advantage by attracting the latter's money. To this end he proposed that, initially, an annual sum be placed at the disposal of American tourism, in the form of hotel, restaurant, travel and other vouchers. Also, scholarships could be offered to encourage Americans to study in France. Thus, the payment of the debt would bring business in return, and pave the way for wider co-operation without dislocating the French economy.³

Whether or not this ingenious scheme might have answered the problem, neither it nor any other solution was, in fact, to be adopted. Moreover, the signatories of the Tripartite Monetary Pact failed to

1. The views stated above are to be found in "Les Dettes, l'Amérique et nous", (Paris-Soir, 3 July 1936), Pr., pp.1209-1213. For similar opinions, see also "Édouard Herriot", (Les Nouvelles littéraires, 28 May 1936), CPC IV, pp.324-325; "La France a perdu une belle occasion lorsque l'Amérique lui proposa le Moratorium Hoover", (Paris-Soir, 8 May 1937), CPC IV, pp.267-271.

2. See "L'Américain travaille .. sur un rythme de dynamo", (Paris-Soir, 23 Aug. 1936), Pr., pp. 1204-1208; "Le Peuple américain vient de prouver qu'il n'est pas un ingrat", (Paris-Soir, 5 Nov. 1936), CPC IV, pp.326-328; "Le Président Roosevelt avec 300.000 jeunes hommes sauve un continent", (Paris-Soir, 20 Jan. 1937), OC XVI, pp. 260-264.

3. See "L'Art de payer ses dettes", (Paris-Soir, 9 Sept. 1936), CPC IV, pp.262-266.

establish a lasting equilibrium between their currencies let alone wider financial and economic co-ordination. A letter from Claudel to Paul Reynaud in July 1937 makes it clear that by then he was deeply disillusioned with the results of the pact. Indeed, this, and his fear that the franc was about to collapse, led him to believe that France had no choice but to take the path of economic autarchy.¹ Nevertheless, we shall find later indications that the Atlanticist aspect of his thinking remained, for he still clung to the hope that America would stand beside France and Britain if war should break out in Europe.

Meanwhile, events in Spain had begun to seriously occupy Claudel's attention. In this context we find the first reappearance of the bellicose thinker who coexisted alongside the ex-Briandist supporter of pacification by non-violent means. His unqualified sympathy for the Spanish Nationalists has already been mentioned briefly in the last chapter. He was, in fact, to play a prominent role in the campaign to publicise Franco's cause, serving at various times as president or organiser of the Comité intellectuel de l'amitié entre la France et l'Espagne, La Solidarité d'Occident and L'Oeuvre latine, the latter two being fund-raising bodies for the rebuilding of churches, hospitals and other public works in Nationalist Spain.²

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1. See letter to Reynaud, 26 July 1937, in Reynaud, Mémoires I, pp.174-175.
 2. For a fairly extensive, favourable account of the background to Claudel's activities on behalf of Franco, drawing on correspondence, etc. in ASPC, see Michel Tolosa, Paul Claudel et l'Espagne, Doctorat de l'Université de Paris, 1963, pp.81-107. Some detail of his public campaigning can also be found, for example, in Maryse Bertrand de Muñoz, La Guerre civile espagnole et la littérature française, Paris, Marcel Didier, 1972, *passim*, (numerous references).

Although he had been sympathetic to Franco from the start, Claudel waited until mid-1937 before taking a public stand with his long poem, "Aux martyrs espagnols", which was to be widely circulated in pro-Nationalist circles.¹ On the same model as his works during the First World War, the poem portrays heroic, eternal Spain, guardian of Catholicism, under attack by forces which are themselves the manifestation of timeless evil. For example, it contains the lines:

C'est la même chose, c'est pareil, c'est ce
que l'on a fait à nos anciens./ C'est ce qui est arrivé
du temps d' Henry VIII, du temps de Néron et de
Dioclétien./ Le calice qu'ont bu nos pères, est-ce que
nous ne le boirons pas la même chose?/ La couronne
d'épines pour eux, pour nous seuls, ce sera-t-il une
couronne de roses?²

This was perhaps a reaction which might be expected from the author of Le Soulier de satin. And of course Claudel was not alone in espousing the doctrine of the holy war in the light of Republican acts of violence against the Church. As René Rémond has put it, "presque tous les catholiques réagirent en hommes de droite" in initially accepting "l'explication qui divisait l'Espagne en deux camps: les soldats de l'Eglise et les impies".³ Furthermore, this interpretation was to be supported, in July 1937, by a collective letter from the Spanish episcopate - welcomed by the Church hierarchy in France, and triumphantly publicised by Claudel in a long article for Le Figaro.⁴

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1. For a brief summary of the poem and account of some reactions to it, see M. Bertrand de Muñoz, *op.cit.*, pp.300-306.
 2. *Po.*, p.567, (The poem was originally written as a preface to J. Estelrich, La Persécution religieuse en Espagne, Paris, Plon, 1937).
 3. Rémond, Les Catholiques, le communisme et les crises, p.177.
 4. See "L'Anarchie dirigée", (Le Figaro, 27 Aug. 1937), *OC* XVI, pp.270-274. For details of the position adopted by the Church hierarchy in France, see Tolosa, *op.cit.*, pp.96-97.

Even before this letter, however, his partisan passions had led him to refuse all idea of mediation when it was put to him by Jacques Madaule or by Alfred Maydieu, representing the minority of Catholic intellectuals who had come to doubt the sanctity of the war in the light of Nationalist atrocities. Shrugging off these barbarities as unproven, Claudel had stated categorically that there could be no negotiation with "les cannibales qui composent le parti rouge et qui nient la religion, la propriété, la famille, la morale et la patrie".¹ His view was subsequently to be echoed in the letter from the Spanish bishops, and the Osservatore Romano itself was to show a marked distaste for those whom it considered to be showing excessive neutrality.² But Claudel's position nevertheless serves as a reminder that the dreamer of social harmony and universal peace could also be an intransigent who would readily condone the most brutal violence in the name of his faith.

With regard to the international implications of the war, his greatest fear - shared by the French Right as a whole - was that if the Republicans won, Spain would become a Russian satellite. It would be "une nouvelle Russie bolcheviste" on France's border, with dire implications for the already unstable, near-revolutionary situation of his own country.³ It was therefore understandable that he should

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1. Letter to Father A. Maydieu O.P. (director of La Vie intellectuelle), 27 May 1937, ASPC, Dossier Guerre d'Espagne. See also letters to Madaule, 1 May and 4 May 1937, ASPC, Dossier Madaule.
 2. See Rémond, Les Catholiques, le communisme et les crises, pp.204-211 for the press debate on this question.
 3. "La Solidarité d'Occident", Le Figaro, 29 July 1938.

denounce what he termed as "l'action méthodique et concertée de la Russie soviétique", despite the fact that Russia was linked to France by a treaty of mutual assistance signed in 1935.¹ As to the Franco-Russian Pact itself, his opinion may be judged from the following conclusion to a long diatribe against Stalinism in La Nouvelle Revue française on 1 August 1938:

C'est avec ce tyran, c'est avec ce peuple de bourreaux et d'esclaves, que la France conservatrice, par les soins de M. Louis Barthou, a conclu ce pacte dont nous retirons tant d'honneur et de profit. C'est ce régime que les Azana et les Caballero, aidés par Moscou, se sont efforcés d'établir à nos portes.²

Claudel's anti-interventionism was not entirely one-sided, but it contained an element of dishonesty. In his manifesto for the Comité intellectuel, he had protested against "toute immixtion étrangère, sous prétexte d'idéologie, dans les affaires du pays."³ This, he told Wladimir d'Ormesson, was aimed at Germany and Italy as well as Russia.⁴ Yet, nowhere in his published writings on the war was there any direct reference to German and Italian activity in Spain. It was perhaps a subject on which he felt some unease. In the same letter to d'Ormesson, on 28 October 1937, he had added that a group of Spanish intellectuals intended to publicly welcome his manifesto, and he had continued:

1. "L'Anarchie dirigée", OC XVI, p.271.

2. "Une saison en enfer", (NRF, 1 Aug. 1938), OC XVI, p.291.

3. Aux intellectuels espagnols, reprinted in Occident, 10 Dec. 1937.

4. Letter to d'Ormesson, 28 Oct. 1937, Dossier d'Ormesson.

Ils voudraient le faire de manière à prendre nettement position contre une prepotenza italienne ou allemande et à faire appel à la France à qui va leur coeur.

On m'a assuré que tout entre Franco et les deux empires se réduit à une question d'argent et que Franco ne demande qu'à être aidé pour mettre ses alliés à la porte.¹

The suggestion here was that he would, in fact, have wished to see France take some form of action on the Nationalists' behalf. What is more, although he wished to minimise the connection between Franco and the totalitarian Powers, he was not unaware that the Nationalists were receiving aid from Germany and Italy. In short, Claudel, along with the vast majority of the French Right, was trapped in another tragic contradiction of the period. On the one hand, his terror of social revolution in France, and his fear of Soviet penetration in Spain, made him see Russia - his country's supposed ally - as the immediate threat. At the same time, by supporting Franco in the knowledge that he was being aided to a greater or lesser degree by Germany and Italy, Claudel tacitly condoned the weakness of the British and French governments when they maintained the fiction of anti-interventionism. Nevertheless, he was not altogether blind to the danger from Germany and Italy. He wanted to believe that Nationalist Spain would be a friendly, conservative neighbour for France, rather than a menacing totalitarian satellite. In this one respect, at least, his hopes were to be sufficiently fulfilled by Franco's promise of neutrality at the time of the Munich crisis in the autumn

1. id.

of 1938. Claudel was naturally overjoyed, and took the opportunity to call for the French Government to accord Franco de jure recognition.¹

D. The Crises (2)

His attitude : towards the extension of German hegemony over central Europe in 1938 was to show no less a wealth of confusions and contradictory aspirations - complicated in this case by the legacy of some of the less attractive facets of his internationalism. To understand his reactions, three preliminary considerations need to be taken into account. Firstly, it should be noted that after his retirement, but before Hitler actually began to annex the countries of central Europe, Claudel had written on several occasions that the division of that region into a mass of small, mutually hostile, economically unviable, states under the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles had been a disaster and a threat to the stability of Europe. Had it been possible at the time, he believed they should have been linked by some form of association around Austria, and he still hoped that in the future the nations concerned would see that it was in their interest to join in "une confédération de peuples enrichie et élargie" under the presidency of Vienna.²

1. Henri Poulain, "Paul Claudel déclare ...", (interview), Occident, 10 Nov. 1938. See also, letter to d'Ormesson, 22 Jan. 1939, Dossier d'Ormesson; and for two later declarations hailing the fruits of Franco's "crusade", see "Le Pape de la paix", Occident, 25 Feb. 1939, and "Hommage", *ibid.*, 30 May 1939.

2. "Les Peuples du Danube au nationalisme étroit doivent préférer l'idée d'harmonie", (Paris-Soir, 22 Nov. 1936), Pr., p.1088. See also, "Sur les ruines du traité de Versailles", CPC IV, pp.274-275; "Philippe Berthelot", Pr., p.1287.

This, it could be said, was in keeping with Claudel's idea of rational organisation and movement towards the unity of Europe. However, and here we reach the second point, it should also be remembered that his notion of international unity was extremely flexible. As certain themes in his earlier writings might suggest, there was room in his thinking both for the unity of voluntary association and for the enforced unity imposed by one imperial nation over others. In November 1936 he did, in fact, write a eulogy of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, describing it, not as a crumbling monstrosity torn by rampant injustice and internal tensions, but as a masterpiece of harmonious international organisation. For him, it was a "large et souple organisme",¹ the epitome of freedom and international brotherhood, or, as he put it at one point, "cette espèce de miracle fédéral et musical, une congrégation de peuples aussi différents que possible ... et cependant, sauf les froissements inévitables, vivant en paix et en joie autour de la même table et du même foyer".² There was thus a curious parallel with his views on labour organisation, in which he could simultaneously admire the voluntary association of the co-operative enterprise and the authoritarian unity of the capitalist industrial concern. Finally, on a slightly different tack, we should bear in mind a letter written to one of his sons in 1932, before Hitler took power in Germany. At that time Claudel had stated his view that "on devrait laisser beaucoup plus de liberté à l'Allemagne dans le bassin du Danube. L'influence de Berthelot et de la Tchécoslovaquie a été néfaste."³ In other words,

1. "Les Peuples du Danube ...", Pr., p.1088.

2. ibid., p.1085.

3. Letter to Pierre Claudel, 31 Oct. 1932, in CPC IV, P.246.

he reproached Berthelot either for obtaining the independence of Czechoslovakia, among other Danubian states, at the Peace Conference of 1919, or for engineering the French guarantee to the Czechs under the Locarno Pact. Moreover, presumably because he wished to see German energies channelled eastwards rather than into potential grievances against France, and because he in any case regarded central Europe as a shambles in its existing form, he had been prepared to countenance some form of expansion in that direction. Had his views changed by the time Hitler began to accomplish precisely that objective?

On 12 March 1938, the day of the Anschluss, Claudel wrote to d'Ormesson in a mood of deep depression, comparing the fate of Austria to the Partition of Poland in the eighteenth century.¹ Revealingly, he excused the inaction of "Europe" - by which he presumably meant France and Britain - on the ground that it was still shattered by the horrors of the last war. On the other hand, he heaped scorn on Italy for abandoning Austria, viewing this as a further example of Mussolini's treachery. However, his diary for the following day contains the note: "Hitler est reçu en Autriche au milieu de l'enthousiasme général. Ainsi on nous avait bourré le crâne."² The uncertainty of his reactions, and his readiness to believe he had been misled by anti-German propaganda may have implied an understandable inclination not to recognise the full extent of French weakness, when faced by an action which her past leaders, including Briand, had condemned in advance.

1. Dossier d'Ormesson.

2. Jo.II, p.226, (13 March 1938).

But they may equally have been influenced by his own earlier views, which have been mentioned above: this was certainly to be the case when he anticipated Hitler's next move.

Within days of the Anschluss the French Press had begun to speculate on what it portended, and to debate whether France should fight in the event of a German invasion of Czechoslovakia. Although the new Blum cabinet formed on 13 March had confirmed its pledges to the Czechs, there was by no means universal agreement in the Press that these pledges should be honoured. Broadly speaking, the supporters of the original Front populaire called for defence of Czechoslovakia in some way or another, while the Right (with some notable exceptions), whether pro- or anti-German, was against defending the Czechs, either on the grounds that France was incapable of doing so, or because Czechoslovakia was not worth defending.¹ Claudel belonged to the latter camp, but for his own reasons he also seemed more than willing to accept that German domination of Czechoslovakia would, in its turn, pave the way for further steps in Hitler's grand design.

His diary, a few days after the Anschluss, records that it would be "une puérilité de vouloir sauver la Tchécoslovaquie".² Militarily impossible because of her geographical position, it was not worthwhile because the country was "une création artificielle composite

1. For a well documented study of press opinion at this time and during the months that followed, see Geneviève Vallette and Jacques Bouillon, Munich 1938, Paris, Armand Colin, 1964.

2. Jo.II, p.226, (15/16 March 1938).

et condamnée d'avance", and in any case, he argued, most of the Czechs saw their best chance lying with Germany rather than with support for Beneš.¹ Moreover, this blithe dismissal of a nation's existence was reinforced by his prior belief that central Europe should be reunited. He was thus prepared to view Hitler's Mittel-europa as inevitable, and indeed as a desirable process of unification:

La plupart des Tchèques sentent que leur chance est du côté de l'Allemagne qui peut leur offrir d'immenses débouchés. De même tous les pays du Danube qui ont 30 ou 40% de leur commerce avec l'Allemagne et l'Autriche. La Mitropa est dans la force des choses jusqu'à la Mer Noire et c'est tant mieux. Cette division d'une foule de petits pays en querelle était un scandale. Une large vie va battre dans tout cet ensemble. Rapport harmonieux de l'industrie, de l'agriculture et des matières premières. Seul point noir le racisme et l'idéologie hitlérienne. Mais il est parfaitement possible, et même obligatoire, que cela change.²

In this case it is naturally impossible to judge the precise balance between his desire to rationalise his country's likely desertion of her ally, and his sincere, if repugnant belief that all means were good if they served to further his peculiarly flexible conception of international unity. Equally, we could only speculate as to why he imagined that Nazism would somehow disappear or change its character. Whatever the case, he appeared an enthusiastic supporter of appeasement. Yet, by the end of May, after the first Sudeten crisis had seemed to be resolved by firm action on Britain's part, he had

1. *ibid.*, pp.226-227.

2. *ibid.*, p.227.

evidently taken heart. Like certain journalists of the Right, such as Léon Bailby, he had switched to advocating resistance to Germany.¹

In an article which appeared in Le Figaro on 28 May 1938, and again in an interview reprinted in Le Journal des débats on 31 August, he declared his conviction that the Czechs could count on the aid of France, Britain, and, he thought, the USA, if Hitler should invade. A long diatribe against Nazism was accompanied by an appeal to Poland - in the name of Catholic solidarity and of her own long-term interests - to forget her grievances against the Czechs and, if necessary, come to their aid against the Antichrist who threatened to destroy them both.² This dramatic change in Claudel's mood was also to be manifested in a patriotic poem, written in June under the title, "Personnalité de la France", and containing the lines: "Solide comme la pierre, / Par l'infini limitée / Une personnalité militaire / Prête de tous les côtés".³

However, when it came to the crisis at Munich three months later these defiant words were forgotten. Like the majority of his compatriots (including, by then, most of the non-communist Left) and their British counterparts, Claudel was immensely relieved to see the threat of war averted at the expense of France's ally. On 20 September

1. See Vallette and Bouillon, op. cit., p.62.

2. "L'Enfant Jésus de Prague", (Le Figaro, 25 May 1938), OC XVI, pp.385-388; Stephan Auban, "Une interview de M. Paul Claudel au sujet de la Pologne", Le Journal des débats, 31 Aug. 1938.

3. "Personnalité de la France", (Le Figaro littéraire, 8 June 1938), Po., p.572.

he remarked in his diary: "Meilleures nouvelles. L'affaire de Tchéc[oslovaquie] a l'air de s'arranger, grâce à une intervention chirurgicale".¹ Four days later, with the outcome of the crisis again uncertain, he was attempting to resign himself to the likelihood of war. To Agnes Meyer he confided: "Je trouve très amer d'être obligés de nous battre, non pas pour la défense de nos frontières, mais pour un peuple qui après tout ne nous est de rien, et que je ne trouve pas spécialement sympathique".² Nevertheless, he added, France would do her duty if she had to: she could not capitulate indefinitely. Finally, on the 30th, the suspense was at an end: "Au matin, nouvelle de l'Accord à quatre à Munich. Quel soulagement! Deo gratias!"³ Later on the same day Claudel wrote to Daladier to congratulate him.⁴

Almost a year was to elapse between the time of the Munich crisis and the beginning of the Phoney War. Although our evidence for most of this period is relatively limited, enough material is available to make it worth adding some comments on Claudel's views during those anxious months, since they, in turn, help to explain the idiosyncracies of the position which he was to adopt after war had been declared.

It need hardly be said that Claudel remained far from eager to see his country drawn into armed conflict with either Germany or Italy. Of these two potential enemies, however, he undoubtedly

1. Jo.II, p.246.

2. Letter to Agnes Meyer, 24 Sept. 1938, Dossier Agnes Meyer.

3. Jo.II, p.247.

4. Claudel refers to the fact in his diary (p.247).

regarded the latter as a far less serious military threat. Thus, on 21 January 1939, at a time when tension between Italy and France was at a peak, he was prepared to dismiss Mussolini's provocations as those of "un aboyeur qui est aux abois", and declared to Agnes Meyer: "S'il nous attaque, nous le reconduirons proprement".¹ Nevertheless, that did not prevent him from being immensely relieved when the Duce's ambitions were diverted to other prey. In fact, a letter written on 13 April, a week after the Italian invasion of Albania, showed him hailing the event as "un véritable succès pour la France", because he took it to indicate that Mussolini had now realised France was "un trop grand morceau" and had therefore turned his sights to the Balkans.²

With regard to the problem of Franco-German relations and the question of further German expansion in central Europe, Claudel's thinking reflected the same ambiguities as it had before Munich. His revulsion against Hitler's methods and ideology was counterbalanced by his basic willingness to see the countries of the Danube Basin linked together around Germany, and by his underlying reluctance to have France dragged into war for the sake of these nations.

At first, during the winter of 1938-1939 he was spared the further necessity of facing up to this dilemma, for the Munich Agreement remained intact and Franco-German relations were ostensibly improving. Hence, when he published a long, fairly optimistic article

1. Letter to Agnes Meyer, 21 March 1939, Dossier Meyer.

2. Letter to Agnes Meyer, 13 April 1939, Dossier Meyer.

in Le Figaro on 28 January, discussing the state of Europe, his views appeared ill-defined and, in some cases, equivocal. On the subject of Germany's future role in central Europe he had the following remarks to make:

De la mer Baltique à la mer Noire au long de l'axe tracé par la nature du Rhin et de l'Elbe jusqu'au Danube un puissant courant d'intérêts ne demande qu'à se créer, dont les bénéfices peuvent être généraux. Si le Reich réduit dans ses liquidités et raidi dans son armature autarcique ne s'est pas privé des instruments qui pouvaient l'aider dans sa nouvelle vocation internationale, si la mystique raciste est adaptée à ce principe nouveau de présidence d'un agrégat hétérogène, la Ligue des Nations no 2! si la base étroite que fournit à cette vaste ambition l'existence de l'unique individu appelé Adolf Hitler est suffisante, c'est une autre question qu'il n'y a pas lieu ici d'examiner. Pour l'instant voici de nouveau au milieu de l'Europe Germania libérée, armée, incertaine et menaçante.¹

Claudé moved on to reassure his readers that sooner or later Europe as a whole would return to sanity. The present failure of the League of Nations did not mean the permanent obliteration of the fundamentally Christian principles on which it had been based, and in time it would eventually be revived. Armed aggression might obtain triumphs, but only for a short time. Neither could totalitarianism - whether German, Italian or Russian - last for ever. Even now he claimed to detect "une résistance sous-jacente" within these three nations.²

1. "Devant le vertige européen", (originally entitled "Aristide Briand et la Société des nations"), Pr., p.1318.

2. ibid., p.1320.

Although he did not suggest what type of regime should replace the Italian and Russian systems, his recent reading of F. W. Förster's L'Europe et la question allemande (to which he referred in his article) had evidently convinced him that while Nazism might be the product of a deep-rooted militaristic tradition, there was also another tradition waiting to reassert itself in Germany: "L'Allemagne fédéraliste, celle du Saint-Empire, de Leibniz, de Constantin Frantz et de Gervinus, celle qui a donné au monde la première ébauche d'une Société des Nations".¹

However, Claudel's statement of faith in moderation, civilised values, fruitful association and internationalism did not answer the immediate practical question of what action should be taken if Hitler sought to extend his power in central and eastern Europe by force of arms. It might have appeared to the readers of Le Figaro that Claudel was in favour of concerted intervention by the Western democracies, for this was surely the logical conclusion to be drawn from the moral principles which he advocated. Moreover, he had argued, albeit unrealistically, that America, Britain and France were now more solidly united than ever before, "et autour d'eux tous ces petits peuples libres qui se sentent menacés par les organisations de proie".² But once again his public position before the event was to be followed by a very different private reaction when a further crisis actually occurred.

1. *ibid.*, p.1321.

2. *ibid.*, p.1320.

The German takeover of Bohemia-Moravia on 15 March and the annexation of Memel a week later did not lead to intervention by Britain and France, but by mid-April there had been a dramatic swing of policy (widely supported in the left- and right-wing press, except by the pro-German fringe) towards pledging military action in the event of future German attacks on other small countries.¹ This was not Claudel's view. Writing to Agnes Meyer on 13 April he remarked: "Autant la mystique de Hitler est misérable, autant sa politique est grandiose et appuyée sur ce que j'appellerai la destinée géographique".² Nothing could now stop Germany in eastern Europe, certainly not "les ridicules barrages que l'Angleterre essaye actuellement d'improviser".³ Above all, the Western democracies needed to buy time while both Hitler and Mussolini exhausted or over-extended themselves - hence the conclusion: "J'espère de toutes mes forces que les démocraties continueront à mener un jeu serré et à laisser les puissances totalitaires se précipiter à la fois au succès et à la destruction. Il nous faut gagner un an".⁴

1. See Vallette and Bouillon, op.cit., pp.235-245.

2. Dossier Meyer.

3. id.

4. id. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that Eugène Roberto (art.cit., pp.180-181) gives a misleadingly one-sided summary of the political content of Claudel's letters to Agnes Meyer during this period. Roberto claims that Claudel's views were "d'une parfaite clairvoyance", because from 1933 to 1938 "il n'a pas vu autrement que comme des menaces pour l'Europe et des 'sombres années' les progrès du national-socialisme et du fascisme, la consolidation de l'empire soviétique". No mention is made of the letter on 24 Sept. 1938 showing Claudel's reluctance to see France go to war for the Czechs, nor of the long letter written on 13 April 1939.

There was thus a marked incongruity between the high moral tone of his article in January and this pragmatic, not to say cynical dismissal of his country's international obligations in April. But even more incongruous was the fact that, in this same letter, the words quoted above were immediately followed by his assertion that if war did nevertheless break out, France would surely have a fine role to play, since a spirit of moral unity and Christian fervour was even now beginning to permeate the nation:

Au point de vue de la France l'offensive des dictatures a été un immense bienfait. Les troubles sociaux ont disparu comme par enchantement, l'union de fait est réalisé, la religion et l'Eglise ont repris un ascendant extraordinaire, les églises sont combles, remplies d'hommes et de femmes qui prient avec ferveur. Pendant les jours saints, j'ai fait à la radio d'État trois lectures pieuses qui ont eu grand succès. Daladier déclare, paraît-il, qu'il faut rechristianiser la France. Qui donc, il y a deux ans, aurait pu prévoir un pareil retournement? Croyez-moi, chère amie, les forces morales de notre pays sont grandes, et si la guerre éclatait, on reverrait les merveilles de 1914.¹

Claudé did not air these opinions in the press. Neither his sense of encouragement at the rightward swing of French political life since the demise of the Front populaire, nor his willingness to see Germany and Italy continue their eastward expansion were mentioned in an interview which he gave to Georges Cattai for Temps présent three weeks later. On this occasion he took up several of the themes from the article that he had published on 28 January. Without discussing how or when Nazism was to be destroyed, he once more asserted that it could not last, and deplored the tyrannical, racialist creed on which Hitler's will to empire was based. Yet, when he offered his own conception of harmonious composite unity in contrast, it was with

1. Letter to Agnes Meyer, 13 April 1939, Dossier Meyer.

a further eulogy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, removed from the harsh realm of historical reality to the plane of aesthetic abstraction. From this he was led to another example of supposedly organic inter-racial harmony - the British colony of Singapore, where the English provided law and administration; the Chinese provided the merchant classes; the Malays, artisans and farmers; the French, nurses and missionaries, so that each racial group fulfilled "une fonction naturelle".¹

In short, the difference between these chosen models and Hitler's nascent empire was one of degree (albeit a very considerable degree), rather than kind. Although Claudel was also an enthusiast of voluntary association, there remained enough of the old-fashioned imperialist in him to have made him thrill to the idea of the Mitteleuropa, if only Hitler had been less overtly despotic. As it was, Claudel still felt an ambivalent admiration for Hitler's grandiose ambitions, and this was no doubt reinforced by the underlying fear of Soviet expansionism which he shared with other members of the French Right. In assessing his reactions, due allowance must be made for the traumatic international climate of the time. But the fact remains that Claudel's two-sided internationalism, coupled with his belief that France should avoid war or postpone it (perhaps until America aligned herself) had prompted him to acquiesce in the destruction of everything for which Briand and Berthelot had once worked. Yet he could console himself that Hitler would ultimately reach a limit. Moreover, there had been hints that if war did become inevitable he would not be slow to beat the patriotic drum:

1. In Georges Cattau, "Paul Claudel regarde le monde," Temps présent, 5 May 1939.

such was to be the case after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on 22 August 1939, which paradoxically increased Claudel's hopes of European unity.

E. The Revival of Claudel's Hopes

On 29 August 1939 Claudel gave a broadcast on the French radio, denouncing the Nazi-Soviet Pact as a further example of Hitler's treachery and opportunism. It was apparent that Claudel now considered war to be unavoidable, and was determined to make a virtue of necessity. As had been the case in 1914, he now conceived the forthcoming conflict in terms of a heroic crusade against the forces of Evil:

Eh bien! à ce débordement de bêtise, d'infamie et de cruauté qui menace d'engloutir l'univers, à cette renaissance du vieux paganisme sous sa forme la plus primitive et la plus hideuse, la France dit non! (...). Elle est prête à recommencer la même lutte pour la cause de Dieu que l'Espagne héroïque vient de conduire victorieusement à sa conclusion.¹

The fact that Franco had been aided by Germany was conveniently forgotten in the fervour of the moment. Indeed, now that the die was cast, and despite his horror at the massacres in Poland that September, Claudel seems to have remained remarkably confident during the Phoney War. Part of the reason for this may have been that the prospect of imminent battle always appealed to one side of his temperament. A further reason, as the above quotation suggests, was that he believed God to be on France's side. In fact, he was to

1. "L'Entente germano-soviétique", text of radio broadcast on 29 Aug. 1939, ASPC, File PXIIB "L'Avant-guerre."

convince himself once more that he was witnessing a fulfilment of the prophecy of Gog and Magog. Germany and Russia were thus identified as the Satanic twins, leading a benighted humanity in revolt against God and against everything noble in man. Basing himself on an imaginative juxtaposition of Biblical texts, he confidently predicted, in November 1939, that they would be utterly destroyed "dans une espèce d'élément international", and hinted of a glorious future to follow.¹

Considerations of internal politics also played their part. The dissolution of the French Communist Party in September was a source of immense satisfaction. A comment on the subject in his diary for early October reads: "Les communistes poursuivis comme traîtres. Que disent Mrs M. et M. qui ont mis leurs noms à côté de ceux de ces misérables. S'ils l'avaient emporté aurions-nous dû faire comme Franco?"² Having been absent from Paris in his country retreat since June, he had apparently remained unaware that in political circles defeatism was spreading, and that internal divisions were so deep as to prevent Daladier from forming a strong Union sacrée cabinet. Hence, Claudel imagined that with the Communists out of the way, a united France would miraculously return to her historic role as defender of Christian civilisation in the short, inevitably victorious war ahead. Thus, he wrote elatedly to d'Ormesson on 4 October:

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1. "La Prophétie des oiseaux", (dated 22 Nov. 1939, first published in Contacts et circonstances, Paris, NRF, 1940), OC XVI, p.436.
 2. Jo.II, pp.285-286, (Oct. 1939). The two names abbreviated here are almost certainly Maritain and Mauriac: see below p.263 for a quotation on the same subject referring to them explicitly by name.

Quel bonheur de vivre en ce temps merveilleux et comme j'envie les jeunes gens! Quel soulagement quand je pense à l'étouffement et presque à l'écrasement de l'année derrière! Voici la France complètement dans son rôle et dans sa vocation, débarrassée de l'immonde emprise marxiste! (Il y a à peine un an que Messieurs Mauriac et Maritain signaient un manifeste à côté des Aragon et des Malraux!).

Sur la guerre, sur la manière de la mener à bien, sur l'État de l'Europe qui suivra notre victoire (à mon avis indubitable et peut-être même prochaine), j'ai beaucoup d'idées dont je vous parlerai quand nous aurons occasion de nous rencontrer à Paris.¹

Finally, his belief in a short war and inevitable victory also stemmed from his illusions concerning the military situation. From his words in a propaganda broadcast made to Germany on 29 October, and from his interpretation of the Gog and Magog prophecy, it seems that he may initially have believed that the Allied blockade would virtually starve Germany into submission.² But with the benefit of hindsight it can be seen that the most fatal illusion, which was unfortunately shared by Pétain and most of the General Staff, was his continued faith in his country's safety from invasion, thanks to the Maginot Line, the impenetrability of the Ardennes, the Belgian fortifications, and the consequent ease of defending France from a forward position on the Meuse and the Albert Canal in Belgium. So, by a supreme irony, on 24 April 1940, only a fortnight before the German invasion, his increasing anxiety at the course of events did not prevent him from reassuring the readers of Le Figaro littéraire: "Avec la ligne Maginot et avec elle celle construite par ce grand patriote

1. Dossier d'Ormesson.

2. See "Adressé au peuple allemand", CPC IV, pp.280-281; "La Prophétie des oiseaux", OC XVI, p.430.

qu'on appelle Devèze qui lui fait suite, nous et nos amis du Nord, pour la première fois dans l'histoire nous sommes à l'abri."¹

In the light of these optimistic beliefs it becomes easier to understand how, on the eve of total war, Claudel's hopes of future European unity were paradoxically renewed. As we have observed on many occasions throughout this chapter, he could always persuade himself that a long-term benefit could result from an immediate evil; that conflict, destruction, the sacrifice of human lives, could be the prelude to closer reconciliation and co-operation in a world where the course of history might be seen as an inexorable (almost dialectical) process of unification.

So it was that the fall of Poland served to further confirm Claudel's idea that the age of small nations had passed. In his letter to d'Ormesson on 4 October 1939, after reflecting on the sad fate of Poland and Czechoslovakia, he had concluded: "Mais des idées qui paraissaient jusqu'ici chimériques deviennent réalisables et, je dirai plus, inévitables".² And on the same day his diary contained the note: "Le matin rêvé aux É[ats]-Unis d'Europe. Il faut roder une maison comme on rode une voiture, seulement il n'y faut pas quelques jours, il y faut un siècle."³

At last, in April 1940, his article, "Le Trait d'union", was to offer a relatively detailed account of how the different facets of

1. "Le Trait d'union", CPC IV, p.288.

2. Dossier d'Ormesson.

3. Jo.II, p.284, (4 Oct. 1939).

his thought cohered together. As was to be expected, his intention was to reconcile the need for security with the ideal of unification. His hostile comments on nationalism in earlier years now had their counterpart in the scheme for an enlightened peace settlement which would avoid the errors of Versailles by creating conditions inimical to the re-emergence of narrow conceptions of national self-interest. Equally, his previous identification of Catholicism with a spirit of universal community was now echoed in his argument that the moral basis for peace in Europe should be the Biblical precept: "Combien il est bon et agréable de vivre frères en un même lieu".¹ Implicitly, therefore, he was once more assuming that the catharsis of war would break down barriers between nations, and thus lead to the forging of closer bonds in peace.

In the same way as he had been critical of Poincaré's harsh policies towards Germany during the early 1920s, Claudel now envisaged a white peace, on the grounds that although Germany must be prevented from future aggression, she must not be stripped of her self-respect. The idea of territorial guarantees, such as annexation of the Rhineland, should be specifically excluded. In his view, some form of federal structure for Germany - allowing the responsible exercise of civic duties and preventing the revival of a Prussian-dominated Reich - would be a major check in itself. By way of further precaution he argued that Germany should be deprived of arms, especially air power, and, in view of its strategic importance, he advocated that the

1. CPC IV, p.287.

Kiel Canal should be internationalised. These could hardly be called punitive measures.¹

Finally, there was renewed emphasis on the idea of European organisation. Claudel was now thinking in terms of a broad structure, with Germany among its leading members (except in military terms) and, he hoped, including Russia once she had rid herself of Stalin, for, as he put it, "nous avons besoin de réunir le monde".² This "nouveau Commonwealth" was intended to embody a principle of active solidarity³ and, by implication, collective security, including international control of air power.⁴ It would also be based on the principle that nations should no longer be permitted to exercise absolute independence within their own frontiers. In keeping with this view, he evidently envisaged limitation of national sovereignty in key areas of activity:

Chacun des participants devra se pénétrer de ce que j'appellerai une conscience européenne. Il devra comprendre que la sublime devise évangélique: Ne faites pas aux autres ce que vous ne voudriez pas qu'on vous fît a un sens non pas seulement négatif mais positif, et que dans une société des nations comme dans une société d'individus le bien de l'ensemble est solidaire de celui des parties. (...). En termes moins imagés, je veux dire qu'il paraît nécessaire qu'à l'organisation particulière de chaque État se superpose une organisation collective, économique, financière, monétaire et surtout judiciaire. C'est ainsi que s'achèvera l'édifice dont la première pierre a été posée à Genève.⁵

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1. See *ibid.*, pp.285-289 for the ideas summarised in this paragraph.
 2. *ibid.*, p.289.
 3. *ibid.*, p.286.
 4. See *ibid.*, p.288.
 5. *ibid.*, p.286.

These views were extremely general, of course. As always, Claudel's thinking lent itself to the broad, sweeping outline rather than the detailed blueprint, so that many vital questions were left open. His notion of European unity included no mention of the institutional framework, for example, nor of the extent to which the sovereignty of the member-nations would be limited in the areas under its jurisdiction. What of its political structure and power? Would there be a considerable degree of political integration? Or would it be a loose confederal organisation such as was envisaged by the Pan-Europe Movement, with whose leader Claudel had recently held a "longue conversation, plutôt chimérique, sur la reconstruction de l'Europe"?¹ To what extent would some members be more equal than others? What would be the relationship between the European community and a revived League of Nations or other quasi-universal bodies?

These and other conspicuous gaps merely serve to emphasise that the theoretical content of Claudel's internationalism remained relatively shallow and extremely flexible. As to the underlying framework of his thinking, its very eclecticism makes it impossible to classify in terms of a particular tradition or tendency. Suffice it to observe that within his spectrum of ideas there existed elements of Christian pacifism alongside elements of bellicism; elements of Catholic universalism combined with elements of the nineteenth-century historicist philosophy of progress; elements of democratic federalism alongside elements of imperialism or hints of messianic nationalism; and finally, in a wider sense, elements of pragmatic Realpolitik

1. Jo.II, p.292, (22 Nov. 1939).

combined with a generous visionary idealism. Yet, precisely because of its inconsistencies and flexibility as to both ends and means, his ideal had shown an extraordinary resilience and would continue to do so in the harrowing years that followed.

CHAPTER VI. Hopes and Humiliations

A. The War.

Despite the speed of the German advance and the collapse of the Maginot strategy by which he had set such store, Claudel seems to have remained surprisingly optimistic: even after the fall of Paris on 14 June he could still talk of his "incroyable sentiment de sécurité et de confiance".¹ While Pétain was forming a new government at Bordeaux, Claudel was making his way to Toulon. On 20 June, after a painful farewell to his wife and children, he embarked for Oran, arriving there on the 22nd, the day the armistice was signed.

Claudel had known of the armistice negotiations but had assumed that the struggle would continue from North Africa, and had hoped that he could be of some use there. However, the experience was to be singularly depressing. Days were spent struggling to see officials, waiting for news that never came, or brooding in cafés with the two air aces, Saint-Exupéry and Corniglion-Molinier. After the arrival of the Massilia had failed to change the situation, Claudel gave up hope of achieving anything there and, on 1 July, began his return to France.²

On his arrival at Brangues he discovered that the Germans had ransacked his home and pinned up threatening drawings of him with his

1. Jo.II, p.315, (14 - 16 June 1940).

2. This information is all based on ibid., pp.316 - 319, (18 June - 5 July 1940). For a probably exaggerated retrospective account, see "Les Confidences de Paul Claudel à Henri Guillemin: Pourquoi j'ai écrit l'Ode au Maréchal", Le Nouveau Candide, 11 - 18 Jan. 1962 (report of an interview in Sept. 1942).

head cut off. A few days later, he was told by his son-in-law that it would be dangerous for him to return to Paris since his photograph had been published in a German newspaper as an enemy of the Reich.¹ He was therefore to base himself at Brangues for the duration of the war.

Claudé's journey to Algeria had only lasted twelve days, and it had come to nothing. Yet it is not without interest when considered in the context of French opinion at the time. He had been an exception to the prevalent mood of demoralised resignation to overall German victory, and he had also given no sign of sharing the resentment that was already felt towards Britain in the aftermath of Dunkerque.² Furthermore, he was to remain unusual in this respect, for he continued to reject the quasi-official anglophobia that followed the British attack on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir on 3 July. He commented in his diary on the 6th: "Discours de Paul Baudouin contre l'Angleterre. Les Boches ont réussi à séparer les deux peuples!"³ And later on the same day, he remarked:

1. The information was given to him by Jacques Paris, but there is no reference to the original source: see Jo. II, p.323, (22 July 1940). Claudé was, in fact, to be placed on the Liste Otto of prohibited writers, also endorsed by Vichy and distributed to publishers in the South: see Roderick Kedward, Resistance in Vichy France, London, O.U.P., 1978, p.188. However, though the first edition of Contacts et circonstances was, apparently, suppressed in 1940, Claudé was able to publish other works and articles throughout those years: see Jacques Petit (ed.) Bibliographie des oeuvres de Paul Claudé, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, (Annales littéraires de l'université de Besançon, 144), 1973, pp.63 - 67.
2. For one eyewitness account of the popular mood, see Alexander Werth, France 1940 - 1955, London, Robert Hale, 1957, pp.27 - 29.
3. Jo. II, p.320, (6 July 1940).

"Nous sommes brouillés avec l'Angleterre en qui seule est notre espérance éventuelle".¹ What is more, even at this stage, though profoundly depressed by the armistice conditions imposed on his own country, he believed he could still discern a number of bright spots in the military situation as a whole; namely, the probability that the German and Italian forces would exhaust themselves, as well as overextending their supply lines, thus giving Britain the opportunity to slowly build up her own resources.²

Of course, these were very early days: the important question is whether he would maintain this anti-defeatist, pro-British stance throughout the war. Given the situation in France during those years, we naturally have to rely on his diary for most of our information on the matter. It is, however, quite revealing, if fragmentary and incomplete. Admittedly, during the first months of the Occupation, when his attention was particularly absorbed with problems at home, he largely restricted himself to straightforward factual notes of events, which tell us little of his attitudes. For example, he wrote: "30 [août] De Gaulle nous annonce la sécession du Cameroun et de l'Afrique Équatoriale Française".³ The use of "nous" might suggest that he was already sympathetic to de Gaulle and that he had heard the news on a British broadcast, but there is no certainty that this was the case. Equally, on 24 September we find the comment: "Affaire de Dakar. Les avions

1. ibid., p.321, (6 July 1940).

2. id.

3. ibid., p.328.

fr[ançais] par les ordres de Pétain bombardent Gibraltar!".¹ In the light of his earlier and later views it would be reasonable to assume that the exclamation mark indicates horror, but again the evidence is very tenuous. All that can be said with absolute certainty before November 1940 is that he regarded the treaty with Japan over Indo-China as "honteux".²

However, as time passed, he left a clearer picture of his reactions. He did not keep a detailed chronicle of events, but it is evident that although there must undoubtedly have been moments of despondency, his sympathies remained constant. At no time was there any hint of resignation or of a softening in his attitude towards the Germans and Italians. Not only did he admire the British for their "attitude tranquillement héroïque", but he also seems to have retained the belief that their victory would be sooner rather than later.³

A selection of examples will illustrate this outlook. The first signs of real encouragement in the diaries were caused by the defeats inflicted on the Italians in Albania and Greece during the last two months of 1940. For instance, at one point in November he wrote gleefully: "Défaites l'une sur l'autre des immondes macaronis en Albanie et à Tarente. Trouvent-ils encore que un giorno

1. *ibid.*, p.331.

2. *id.*, (23 Sept. 1940).

3. Letter to Paul-Louis Weiller, 19 May 1941, ASPC, Dossier Paul-Louis Weiller.

di leone e miglior che cento giorni di muttone?".¹ Further Greek victories in the early weeks of 1941, coinciding with Wavell's successes in Cyrenaica, gave Claudel grounds for an optimistic assessment of the overall military situation on 9 February. He already envisaged the British driving across North Africa to link up with the French colonies. The Italians appeared "réduits à l'impuissance", and he refused to believe that a German attack on the English mainland could ever succeed: indeed, he even dwelt on the possibility of a British invasion of France.²

In the event, the fall of Greece in April showed that his hopes were wildly exaggerated, but Claudel, following events on the BBC, grasped at every straw in the months that followed. Thus, when a state of National Emergency was declared in the United States at the end of May, Claudel was already hailing it as "le tournant de la guerre".³ More promising still was Hitler's invasion of Russia a month later. Claudel's joy was boundless - the two evil forces were about to destroy each other:

22 juin - Dimanche du Sacré-Coeur. Immense nouvelle! De l'Océan Glacial à la Mer Noire sur un front de 2.500 km. l'Allemagne flanquée de la Finlande à gauche et de la Roumanie à droite attaque la Russie soviétique! Haec est mutatio dexterarum Altissimi! Merci, mon Dieu de m'avoir permis de voir cela! Les deux immondes complices, Hitler et Staline, se prennent aux cheveux! Les monstres se dévorent! C'est la réalisation de tous mes rêves. Et pendant ce temps l'Amérique se prépare à entrer dans la bataille!

1. Jo. II, p.335, (Nov. 1940). See also ibid., pp.338, 340, 342, and passim throughout the Occupation.

2. ibid., pp.345 - 347.

3. ibid., p.361, (28 May 1941).

Ah, c'est trop beau!¹

The pattern was to continue: in a letter dated 8 September, Claudel predicted a decisive offensive in Libya, and final victory for the following spring.² Three months later, he was still voicing his belief in imminent, total defeat for Germany and her allies.³ Remarks in his diary throughout 1942 and the remaining years of the war concentrated almost exclusively on positive developments, sparing only the occasional word for German advances. Even the abortive Dieppe raid in August 1942 would be hailed as "le premier coup frappé à la porte de notre prison".⁴ Or, to cite another source, the German surrender at Stalingrad in February 1943 was immediately followed by the writing of a jaunty poem, "Le Joli Printemps 1943", which ends with the lines: "J'ai ôté mon pardessus. / L'Allemagne montre son cul, / L'air est doux, le ciel est bleu. / Ma foi, vive le bon Dieu!".⁵

Meanwhile, on another level of his thought, Claudel's longer-term hopes were reflected by the way in which he chose to see the war as fitting into the pattern of history. Not long after his return to Brangues in 1940 he had started on a further study of Revelations, which was to occupy him for the next three years. In his new exegesis the war was interpreted in two ways. On the one

1. *ibid.*, pp. 364-365.

2. Letter to Weiller, 8 Sept. 1941, Dossier Weiller.

3. Letter to Weiller, 9 Dec. 1941, Dossier Weiller.

4. *Jo.* II, p. 410, (20 Aug. 1942).

5. Dated 5 Feb. 1943, *Po.*, p. 582.

hand, it could be considered as divine punishment for man's obsessive materialism.¹ But on the other hand, it could also be seen as a further paradoxical step towards the unity of the human race.²

Claudé now appeared far more interested in the linear development of history than he had been when he wrote Au Milieu des vitraux ten years earlier. In the latter he had interpreted the letters to the Seven Churches at the start of Revelations as representing seven images of the Church throughout all time,³ whereas he now saw these same letters as prophesying seven consecutive periods in the history of mankind. Within this perspective, the time at which he was writing could be located at the start of the sixth period, the character of which was indicated by its title, "Philadelphie", the city of brotherly love.⁴

Thus, he had provided himself with a mystical basis for visions of a better future. The war could be pictured in terms of his old idea of a universal embrace, a quest for communion through conflict, "une insurrection générale contre les frontières".⁵ Beyond the unprecedented destruction and the clash of massive forces, literally the whole of mankind could be seen in search of a new order, "pour lequel chacun ne peut plus se passer de personne".⁶

1. See Paul Claudé interroge l'Apocalypse, OC XXV, pp.42-43, 148-149.
2. See *ibid.*, pp.354-355, 358-359.
3. See Au milieu des vitraux de l'Apocalypse, OC XXVI, pp.40-42 and p.329.
4. See Paul Claudé interroge l'Apocalypse, OC XXV, pp.354, 418.
5. *ibid.*, p.355.
6. *ibid.*, p.354.

Moreover, the present sufferings of the Jews were also fitted into this framework, their sacrifice being the final trial of Israel before its conversion and reconciliation with the Church.¹

In fact, Claudel seemed to hesitate between different degrees of utopianism. Early in his discussion of "Philadelphie" he explicitly denied that the future unity of mankind was to be equated with the millenarian dream of a Second Coming and a temporal New Jerusalem.² Indeed, he emphasised that this unity would itself be a temptation away from God: "une telle réquisition de l'individu par la société qu'elle ne laisse plus place à ce nom propre en qui il est connu et appelé de son Créateur".³ Yet, at the end of the chapter, carried away by his enthusiasm for the ideal of organic unity, he predicted that the new age might indeed become a fore-image of the heavenly New Jerusalem, and that:

Sous le poids de la connaissance de Dieu, sous ce cimier énorme, sous cette pression d'un univers à l'autre superposé, les forces de l'égoïsme et du préjugé seront impuissantes à tenir bon, et les eaux de la Charité et de la Justice jailliront jusqu'aux extrémités de la Cité.⁴

In short, although he had explicitly avoided the letter of the millenarian heresy, its spirit had left a strong imprint on the vision of Philadelphia (itself so reminiscent of "la Cathédrale des jours futurs" in the last section of the Conversations⁵) conceived by

1. See *ibid.*, pp. 399-406.

2. See *ibid.*, p.402.

3. *id.*

4. *ibid.*, p.416.

5. Pr., p.795.

the utopian side of Claudel's imagination. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that, in so far as it was an antidote to the horrors of the period in which it was written, his "Philadelphie" appeared to serve a similar purpose to the original eschatological prophecies by which Jewish and, later, Christian groups, had, as Norman Cohn puts it, "consoled, fortified and asserted themselves when confronted by the threat or reality of oppression".¹

Be that as it may, the more down-to-earth counterpart of these speculations was his continuing interest in the practical possibilities of international organisation. An article which he had published in Switzerland in 1941 reaffirmed his faith in the guiding principles of the League of Nations and stated his belief that it, or something very similar, would be rebuilt after the war.² Equally, in 1942 he could still be found suggesting to Emmanuel Monick that there might eventually be "une Europe autour de l'axe Elbe-Danube, où l'élément allemand serait balancé par les autres races".³ And in April 1943, his diary mentions the idea for a book on the future Europe "conçue à la manière d'une Société Commerciale". He would have entitled it Europa Incorporated.⁴

It will be useful to bear in mind all of these hopes for the future, and the apparent consistency of his faith in the Allied cause,

1. Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millenium, revised edition, London, Paladin, 1970, p.19.
2. "Paul Hymans", (La Gazette de Lausanne, 19 April 1941), CPC IV, pp.308 - 311.
3. Jo. II, p.386, (17 Jan. 1942).
4. ibid., p.449, (25 April 1943).

as we move on to discuss the complexities and ambiguities of his thinking in other areas.

B. Early Reactions to Vichy.

It was natural that Claudel should welcome the demise of the parliamentary Republic which he had despised for so long. In fact, from many points of view the new régime might at first have appeared to be based on political and social conceptions very similar to his own. On 6 July 1940, two days before Alibert's Exposé des motifs (the project for the new Constitution) was presented to the deputies at Vichy, Claudel had listed his hopes for the future:

La France est délivrée après 60 ans du joug du parti radical et anti-catholique (professeurs, avocats, juifs, francs-maçons). Le nouveau gouvernement invoque Dieu et rend la Gr^{ande}-Chartreuse aux religieux. Espérance d'être délivrés du suffrage universel et du parlementarisme: ainsi q^{ue} de la domination méchante et imbécile des instituteurs q^{ui} lors de la dernière guerre se sont couverts de honte. Restauration de l'autorité.¹

The replacement of democracy by an authoritarian system based on traditional Catholic values was, of course, something which he had long desired as the only means of restoring political and moral unity to his country. Indeed, this was precisely what he had recently been demanding when he called for a "crise de renouvellement" during the thirties. It also goes without saying that the restoration of the Church to a central position in the life of the nation was a hope

1. Jo. II, p.321.

which could not have been dearer to his heart. And so too was his desire to see the destruction of the Republic's educational system from top to bottom, for his memory of the years before 1914 had by no means been softened by the passing of time and he had continued to blame the University and the instituteurs for sowing envy and hatred in the minds of the people.¹

In fact, his mention of the Grande-Chartreuse is particularly significant in this respect. The monastery, in its magnificent alpine setting, had been a favourite destination for his excursions since 1921. For him, it was not only a place of beauty but also of sadness, because the monks themselves had been driven out. Thus, on one of his visits he had written that he saw the two huge beech trees standing near the abandoned edifice as being there, "à la place des religieux expulsés et perpétuant leur impétration".² On the most recent occasion, moreover, in September 1937, the wound had been opened further. To his horror, he discovered that the monastery was being used as a university summer school, and he had commented angrily on this final indignity: "Ainsi ces immondes pions ou morpions s'installent impudemment dans cette maison volée par leur digne chef Émile Combes".³

Latterly, to these and to all his other grievances had been added the fact that when he was in Algeria both Saint-Exupéry and Corniglion-Molinier, while discussing the success of the German advance, had apparently told him of "la pagaïe des troupes françaises,

1. See, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 141, 142 - 143; Claudel, letter to Gay, 3 July 1936, Dossier Gay.

2. Jo. II, p.106, (30 Aug. 1935).

3. *ibid.*, p.205, (30 Sept. 1937). See also "A la Grande-Chartreuse", Po., pp.908 - 910.

les officiers (réservistes instituteurs lâchant pied les premiers)".¹

The teachers, who had been guilty of pacifism before the First World War, had supposedly proved themselves cowards in the Second.

So, in July 1940, whilst highly satisfied with the ending of parliamentary rule, Claudel showed even greater enthusiasm for reparation of the injury done to the soul of France by secular education. On the 9th he wrote:

Dans l'Exp[osé] des motifs on reconnaît le mal fait par l'éducation sans Dieu. C'est toute l'Université, oeuvre de Napoléon, qu'il faudrait f. par terre. Toute l'idolâtrie classique.²

And on the following day, after the Assemblée nationale had obligingly voted itself out of existence, he commented:

Le 10 [juillet] à Vichy. Vote de l'Assemblée Nationale et fin du régime parlementaire et de la domination des francs-maçons et des instituteurs. Du moins espérons-le. Il n'y aura rien de fait tant que l'on n'aura pas abattu l'Université de France et l'éducation classique.³

Parliamentary government was already dead, and a few weeks later he would see the repeal of the "loi infâme" of 1904, which had banned the congregations from teaching.⁴ In this sense, Vichy had turned the clock back and fulfilled two of Claudel's dearest dreams.

1. Jo. II, p.318, (27 June 1940). It seems that Pétain also shared this belief: see Robert Paxton, Vichy France, London, Barrie and Jenkins, 1972, p.37.

2. Jo. II, p.322.

3. id.

4. See *ibid.*, p.328, (4 Sept. 1940).

But can it be said with certainty that he followed the vast majority of his compatriots in their enthusiastic support for Vichy during the early months of the Occupation? What was his attitude to Pétain's government itself?

Claudé had first met the Marshal at Verdun in 1920 while accompanying the King of Denmark on a visit to the battlefield. On that occasion he had obviously been impressed, describing Pétain as: "Le général français type, illustration d'un roman populaire".¹ When they had met again in 1931, Claudé had once more given a flattering description of him in his diary.² There were to be other meetings in the years that followed, and Pétain was to be one of those who voted for Claudé in the elections to the Académie Française in 1935.³ It therefore seems reasonable to suppose that Claudé would have retained his admiration for the Marshal. Yet, curiously enough, there is not a word of praise for Pétain, scarcely a mention of his name in Claudé's diary at the start of the Occupation, and certainly no public sign at a time when so many writers were lauding the new authority of this charismatic figure. Indeed, Claudé's only comment on the Government itself, when he assessed his country's situation on 6 July, was to note:

1. Jo. I, p.498, (9 Dec. 1920).

2. See ibid., p.973, (15 Oct. 1931).

3. See Jo. II, pp.78,86, (Jan.-March 1935) concerning the Académie elections, and ibid., p.132, (March 1936) for reference to a later meeting.

"Les hommes qui nous gouvernent n'inspirent pas confiance (Pierre Laval)".¹ Given this comment, and the fact that he was depressed by the Government's handling of relations with Britain, was there perhaps an element of ambivalence in his attitude to the new régime at its inception?

The evidence available does not provide an answer to this question. But it is certain that there were divisive issues on the horizon, of both a general and a more personal nature. As to the first category, it predictably related to Vichy's foreign policy. In particular, he was to evince disgust for the policy of official collaboration with Germany that was inaugurated by the meetings at Montoire on 22 and 24 October. His furious reaction at the time may be judged from comments in his diary:

Les évêques allemands réunis à Fulda déclarent solennellement que l'Allemagne est engagée dans une lutte pour la liberté des peuples! L'Illustration publie des articles infâmes d'un certain Jacques de Lesdain: la France est une fille publique qui doit choisir son maquereau: or c'est le Boche qui paraît actuellement le plus fort!

25 [octobre] Négociations pour la paix de Laval et du Maréchal. On cède tout. La France se remet comme une fille à son vainqueur.²

What particularly disturbed Claudel was to find those who should have known better, fellow-Catholics, publicly assuming the most abject roles. He was disgusted to find Cardinal Baudrillart, whom he had known well for some thirty years, writing in La Croix

1. Jo. II, p.321.

2. ibid., p.334.

to recommend wholehearted co-operation with Germany.¹ And it was not only the aged Cardinal who had taken leave of his senses: other representatives of Catholic opinion seemed to be moving in a similar direction:

Fernand Laurent dans le Jour déclare que le devoir des catholiques est de se serrer autour de Pétain, c'est-à-dire autour de Laval et de Hitler. - Les catholiques de l'espèce 'bien-pensants' sont décidément écoeurants de bêtise et de lâcheté.²

It is not absolutely clear from these words whether Claudel himself was placing Pétain on the same plane as Laval and Hitler, or whether that was merely his interpretation of Laurent's message. Be that as it may, aside from the problem of collaboration, so divisive of opinion in the country as a whole, Claudel had recently had reason for disappointment with the Marshal in another area which touched him even more directly: the fate of his business associate and relative by marriage, Paul-Louis Weiller, who was managing director of the Société des Moteurs Gnome et Rhône, the massive aero-engine firm of which Claudel himself had become a director in 1935.

According to Claudel's later, possibly biased account, Weiller's success had already made him the object of resentment in ministerial circles before the war. Aware of the inadequacy of the French airforce, Weiller had made demands for the setting-up of factories in North Africa, but had been ignored until after the German invasion had begun. At that point, when it was too late, he had been ordered to Morocco to establish a factory there, but instead he had fled to Portugal.

1. *ibid.*, p.337, (Nov. 1940).

2. *id.*

However, when ordered by Vichy to return to France he had done so, and almost immediately, on 6 October, he was administratively interned at Pellevoisin.¹ No formal charges were made, but it is clear from their correspondence that Claudel believed Weiller to be innocent of any real crime, except disobedience of orders, and to be the victim of petty jealousy.²

The day after Weiller's arrest, Claudel was at Vichy to intercede on his behalf. Having achieved nothing in this direction, he wrote a personal letter to the Marshal, as did Weiller a few days later. Claudel had high hopes of these appeals, but they were to be crushingly disappointed. Pétain replied through a private secretary, his letter arriving, by an unpleasant coincidence, at the time of the Montoire meetings. It stated that, "entre autres raisons", Pétain strongly reproached Weiller for disobeying orders, but it did not elaborate on what his other crimes were supposed to be.³ A few days later Claudel received news that Weiller had now been deprived of his French citizenship and all his property. He wrote an outraged letter to his friend on 1 November, and another, two days later. The second of these showed that in his present mood he was developing a deep sense of grievance against Vichy. He expressed his fury that while Weiller was rotting in prison, men like Léon Bailby "font la loi et les prophètes à Vichy et procèdent à la purification de la

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1. See Claudel, "Au sujet du commandant Paul-Louis Weiller", undated document in Dossier Weiller; also Jo. II, p.332, (Oct. 1940) and passim thereafter.
 2. See letters to Weiller, 15 Oct. 1940, 19 May 1941, 1 Sept. 1941, etc., all Dossier Weiller; Jo. II, p.347 and passim where he writes of the alleged injustice committed.
 3. Quoted by Claudel in letter to Weiller, 25 Oct. 1940, Dossier Weiller. The letter from Pétain has been lost or destroyed.

France...."¹ It was also apparent that he had felt extremely slighted by Pétain's impersonal reply to the appeal in his letter.

It could be said that at this time, after only four months of Vichy rule, the seeds of disaffection already appeared to have been sown, by the degrading policy of official collaboration on the one hand, coinciding with the specific case of his friend on the other, to say nothing of the personal offence to himself. Moreover, although the Weiller case appears to have hung fire for some three months afterwards as far as Claudel was concerned, in the first week of December there was a comment in his diary, revealing his sour attitude towards Vichy, and giving a hint of the background to the Weiller affair:

Les militaires qui sont responsables de notre défaite et qui ont donné l'exemple de la lâcheté et de la débandade essayent de rejeter la faute sur les autres. Honteuse condamnation de Jean Zay. A Vichy on ne voit que des galonnés. L'imbécile Vuillemin, aussi responsable que Cot et Guy La Chambre de l'état de notre aviation, couvert d'honneurs. Darlan, qui a fait toute sa carrière dans les antichambres.²

At the very inception of Vichy, the Exposé des motifs had heralded the witch-hunt for those who were supposedly responsible for the defeat. By now the search was under way, and Weiller was an

1. Letter to Weiller, 3 Nov. 1940, Dossier Weiller. Léon Bailby was a journalist of the extreme Right.
2. Jo. II, p.338, (Dec. 1940). For references to the career, imprisonment and subsequent murder of Jean Zay, half-Jewish former député and minister under the Front Populaire, see William L. Shirer, The Collapse of the Third Republic, London, Heinemann, 1969, passim. Cot, La Chambre and General Vuillemin had all held the post of Minister of Aviation at different times during the last years of the Third Republic.

ideal scapegoat - the perfect figure for a Maurrassian caricature of the Jewish capitalist who had made a fortune dealing in military equipment under the Republic - for Gnome et Rhône had been the largest French manufacturer of engines for military aircraft and was therefore an obvious target for accusations. It would soon become apparent that this was, in fact, the case.

C. The "Paroles au Maréchal" and after

On 27 December 1940 Claudel wrote an ode to Pétain: it was a poem which would cause him embarrassment and regret in years to come. In mid-October, the actress Eve Francis had suggested the idea for a production of L'Annonce. Claudel had been enthusiastic and had successfully sought backing for the project, with the result that the play was initially staged at Lyon on 18 December under the auspices of the cultural association, Les Heures. Its success was encouraging and there was hope of an official subsidy for its performance at Vichy and a tour of the Unoccupied Zone.¹ In Claudel's diary for the 27th we find the brief note: "A l'occasion de la représentation éventuelle de l'Annonce à Vichy, j'écris un poème au Maréchal Pétain".²

The themes of this much-quoted poem are well known. The Republic is referred to contemptuously as "un rêve baroque"³, and France is called upon to renounce "la politique"⁴, to rise from the dead, and to return to her eternal role, for her soul remains pure. The warrior

1. See E. Francis, op. cit., pp.291 - 295; and Jo. II, pp.333, 338 - 339 for details.

2. Jo. II, p.340.

3. "Paroles au Maréchal", Po., p.578.

4. ibid., p.580.

saints, Jeanne d'Arc and St. Louis, so dear to Claudel and so much a part of Vichy mystique, appear once again as symbolic reminders of a glorious national heritage, long abandoned but now once more within reach if Frenchmen will only grasp "l'idée poignante du devoir".¹ Pétain himself is represented as a saviour, an almost holy figure who alone can raise France from her humiliation. He is also "ce vieil homme qui se penche sur toi et qui te parle comme un père", a benign patriarch, gently yet firmly leading his children back to the right path.² France must place her faith in him and pay heed to "cette voix raisonnable....,/Cette proposition comme de l'huile et cette vérité comme de l'or!"³

The tone of the poem is familiar: it mirrors the public image which Pétain had tried to project, and at the same time it revives themes which had appeared on earlier occasions in Claudel's work: the idealised figure of the warrior-father-holy leader, for instance, or the traditional values of piety, honour, loyalty and devotion to duty. It was duly to be declaimed by Eve Francis during the interval at the first night of L'Annonce at Vichy on 9 May 1941 and was to be published in Le Figaro on the following day.⁴

According to Maurice Martin du Gard, it was rumoured, at the time, that the ode was written with an eye to obtaining an ambassadorship.⁵

1. id.

2. *ibid.*, p.579.

3. *ibid.*, p.580.

4. See Jo. II, p.358, (9 May 1941).

5. See Maurice Martin du Gard, La Chronique de Vichy 1940 - 1944, Paris, Flammarion, 1948, p.183.

Subsequently, when placed alongside the ode to de Gaulle which he wrote in 1944, it has often been seen as a piece of blatant political opportunism by an ex-servant of the Third Republic who would curry favour with any régime which happened to be in power.¹ As to the first of these charges, there appears to be no evidence thus far to support Martin du Gard's rumour: indeed, he himself considered it unlikely. The second charge, though based on the most superficial evidence, does raise a more difficult question: we need not doubt that Claudel continued to hold the general ideals expressed in the poem, but in late December, after the disappointments of the previous two months, did he honestly believe Pétain really was the providential leader who would ensure that they were fulfilled? In other words, there is a certain inconsistency between the tone of his private views in his diary and letters to Weiller up to early December, and the eulogy he wrote on the 27th for publication.

Can we explain this? Most of Claudel's retrospective explanations - given after he had come to regret writing the poem - reduce the question to the most simple terms. When the poem was republished in a collection after the war, Claudel added, in a footnote, that he had kept it as a monument to his

1. See, for example, Maurras's reply to Claudel's testimony, in Le Procès de Charles Maurras, Paris, Albin Michel, 1946, p.33 ff.; A. Werth, *op.cit.*, p.44; Hervé Le Boterf, La Vie parisienne sous l'Occupation, Vol.II, Paris, Éds. France-Empire, 1975, pp.252-253; Orion (Jean Maze), Nouveau Dictionnaire des girouettes, Paris, Le Régent, 1948, pp.160-170.

own naivety, and continued: "Sa date lui sert d'excuse: la radio nous avait annoncé que, le 13 décembre, Pierre Laval avait été renvoyé et arrêté".¹ Previously, in a letter to de Gaulle on 18 October 1944, he had said much the same thing: he had simply been taken in by Pétain, and after Laval's dismissal he had believed that "le vieil homme avait un sursaut d'honneur, qu'il allait se servir des atouts réels qu'il avait en mains".² Equally, in an interview with Jacques Madaule a few months earlier he had also said much the same, though he had also mentioned that he had been impressed by Pétain's measures in favour of the congregations, and against freemasonry, alcoholism and divorce.³ But in a statement to Henri Guillemin in September 1942, rather nearer to the time when the poem was written, the issues had appeared more complex. On this occasion he had remarked:

Il m'a eu. J'avais de la sympathie pour lui: il avait voté pour moi à l'Académie. Je le croyais loyal. En juillet 40, quand j'ai vu tant de députés voter pour ses pleins pouvoirs, je me suis dit que, ma foi, il ferait peut-être de bonnes choses. Sa lutte contre l'alcoolisme me plaisait, et l'appui qu'il voulait donner aux écoles libres. Je suis allé le voir trois fois, pour qu'il protège mon ami Paul-Louis Weiller contre les Allemands. Une fois, à table, me parlant de Laval, il m'a dit: 'Celui-là, je l'ai balayé!'. J'avais marché, quoi! Quand j'ai écrit mon ode sur lui, le jour de Noël 40, il était question d'une tournée quasi-officielle

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1. Poèmes et paroles durant la guerre de Trente ans, Paris, NRF, 1945, reprinted in Po., p.580.
 2. Letter to de Gaulle, 18 Oct. 1944, ASPC, Dossier de Gaulle.
 3. Jacques Madaule and Pierre Schaeffer, Claudél parle, Paris, O.P:É.R.A. 1965, p.16.

de l'Annonce faite à Marie. Le gouvernement devait donner 50.000 francs de subvention à la première. Maintenant, j'ai compris.¹

What are we to conclude from these statements? The common factor in all of them was his joy at the dismissal of Laval: this would have been a natural reaction since Claudel had distrusted him from the start. If his faith in Pétain had been shaken by a belief that the Marshal was a pawn in Laval's game, this popular decision could well have convinced him, as it did many others, that Pétain had now managed to rid himself of the degrading collaborationist influence in his camp, thus showing his courage as a leader and paving the way for France to regain her self-respect. A passage in a letter written by Claudel to Agnes Meyer appears to confirm that this had, in fact, been his view. The letter was dated 1 January 1941, and it contained the following comment:

Toute notre pensée est tournée vers l'Amérique, elle est rangée derrière son président comme nous le sommes derrière le Maréchal dont l'autorité s'est beaucoup accrue depuis quelque temps. On vient de jouer l'Annonce à Lyon: trois représentations qui ont eu beaucoup de succès, et on la redonnera, j'espère, à Vichy devant le Maréchal à qui j'ai dédié un beau poème.²

At the same time, his statement to Guillemin is misleading because it suggests that his favourable reaction to Laval's

1. H. Guillemin, "Les Confidences de Paul Claudel à Henri Guillemin", loc. cit.

2. In Dossier Meyer.

dismissal had been reinforced, when he met Pétain, by the offer of help for Weiller and a subsidy for L'Annonce. In fact, he had not yet seen the Marshal, he had not yet been promised help for Weiller, nor had he been assured of a large subsidy for his play: we shall see that this would not happen until some weeks later. However, it is quite possible that his hopes of obtaining Pétain's aid in these areas and, perhaps, of procuring his son's release from a German prison camp,¹ influenced his desire to write the poem. Therefore, it can be said that whilst the charge of opportunism appears exaggerated, personal motives may well have played some part.

Nevertheless, if Claudel's reasoning cannot be established beyond doubt in this question, it is certain that his meetings with Pétain early in March 1941 were to produce a most favourable impression. In the meantime, there had been encouraging signs in the Weiller affair, since Barthélemy, the new Minister of Justice, had promised to rectify the case, which now appeared clearly to Claudel as a plot launched by the Air Ministry to cover up its own responsibility for the

1. Claudel feared that his son, Pierre, would be among those deported to Germany. He had written to Pétain on the subject towards the end of November 1940 (see Jo. II, p.366). In the event Pierre was released on 21 Jan. 1941 "grâce aux efforts de l'amiral Leahy, ambassadeur d'Amérique, et de M. de Brinon, dit-on", (Jo. II, p.343), but there is no reference to whether the Marshal had intervened.

state of the airforce, and furthered by Alibert, "un maniaque de l'antisémitisme".¹

Claudé arrived in Vichy on 9 March to spend three days pleading his friend's cause. It was not a productive visit in concrete terms, since he learned that the Germans were opposed to Weiller's rehabilitation. However, Claudé was able to spend a considerable length of time in private meetings with the Marshal himself, and he emerged with the belief that they could now count on Pétain's help and sympathy. What is more, the Marshal, perhaps in order to show good will, also promised Claudé a subsidy for L'Annonce.² This combination of apparent sympathy for Weiller and flattering support for his own work drew a particularly fulsome letter from Claudé to Pétain on 18 March. Its purpose was obviously to keep both issues fresh in the Marshal's mind, and, besides an appeal on Weiller's behalf, as well as references to L'Annonce, it contained a mention of Claudé's niece who was touring the country "accompagnée du poème qui donne expression aux sentiments de reconnaissance et d'affection que nous ressentons tous à votre égard....."³

1. Jo. II, p.347, (17-19 Feb. 1941).

2. See *ibid.*, p.350, (9-12 March 1941) and letter to Weiller, 13 March 1941, Dossier Weiller.

3. Letter to Pétain, 18 March 1941, Dossier Weiller.

It could be said that this marked the high point of Claudel's regard for Pétain. A letter which he sent to Eve Francis on 20 March is especially revealing of his attitude at that time. It shows that he made a sharp distinction between the unsavoury practices of Vichy as a whole, and the Marshal, whom he saw to some extent as its victim:

Vous n'avez pas d'idée du milieu qu'est Vichy, des haines, des intrigues qui s'y démènent! Le Maréchal est entouré d'un barrage, et je crois que l'argent qu'il m'a promis vient de sa cassette personnelle. Heureusement que j'ai auprès de lui un ami appelé René Gillouin qui peut percer les barrages.¹

However, this was not a belief which he would maintain for very much longer.

D. The End of the Illusion

Ironically, it was as a result of Claudel's stay in Vichy for the première of L'Annonce that his regard for Pétain began to sour. While there, he learned that the commission investigating Weiller's case had reached an adverse decision, and this discovery led to a heated scene with Barthélemy. Moreover, from Gillouin or from other sources he heard of further examples of Vichy inhumanity and injustice committed by the "petits infatués déchaînés" who now held absolute power.² In this mood of disgust - no doubt heightened by the fact

1. Letter to Eve Francis, 20 March 1941, in Francis, op. cit., p.293. René Gillouin, a writer, was a member of Pétain's personal entourage.

2. Jo. II, p.358, (8 - 10 May 1941).

that Pétain did not attend the première - Claudel still saw the Marshal as being surrounded by "crapules", but there was already a definite suggestion of personal reproach when he wrote:

Le Min[ist]re de la Justice (!), Barthélemy aussi lâche que possible dans l'affaire P.-L. Weiller]. C'est lui qui me dit textuellement: Il n'y a plus de Justice! - Et l'honneur, M. le Maréchal? Il n'y a plus d'honneur depuis l'armistice!¹

By this time, Pétain's popularity was in any case on the wane in the country as a whole, and increasingly repressive measures were being taken to curb dissidence. In fact, shortly after his arrival back at Brangues, Claudel received news that 7,000 syndicalists, including members of Catholic unions, had been imprisoned without trial. Meanwhile, to Claudel's immense chagrin, Cardinal Baudrillart was still vociferously demanding closer collaboration with Germany.² Writing to Weiller on 19 May, after praising the heroism of the British, he could only say of his own country: "Hélas! Ce n'est pas la posture générale du pays et les nouvelles de ces jours-ci me remplissent d'humiliation".³ Three days later these reactions were further confirmed by gruesome tales from Wladimir d'Ormesson, who told him of more cruelties and injustices, including judicial murder of Gaullists, betrayal of German political refugees, and personal vendettas. At the end of this long, depressing list, Claudel added bitterly in his diary: "Suivez-moi sur le chemin de l'honneur! dit

1. id.

2. *ibid.*, p.359, (11 - 12 May 1941). For other comments on Baudrillart, see *ibid.*, pp.382, 383, 400 - 401, 402.

3. Letter to Weiller, 19 May 1941, Dossier Weiller.

le Maréchal".¹

From this stage onwards, the situation was to worsen with every piece of news, telling of collaborationist speeches by Pétain, Darlan and others; ignominious policies abroad; and further repressive measures at home. By August, he was referring to Pétain sarcastically as "notre glorieux Maréchal" and would lose no chance to gibe against him, vituperate against his policies, and bemoan the continuing injustice done to Weiller:² one such example might be:

Discours à Lyon de M. Paul Marion, ancien collaborateur de l'Humanité où il signait 'Gueule de vache'. Il nous engage à nous jeter aux pieds de l'Allemagne et à croire au Maréchal qui, paraît-il, n'a jamais cessé d'avoir une mentalité de "vainqueur"(!). Dans une petite fête à Vichy ce dernier vend sa canne 144.000 francs à un industriel lyonnais qui la donne à sa ville natale. Serons-nous admis à la couvrir de baisers? - le Ministre de la Justice Joseph Barthélemy m'avise que le Comité de révision a émis un avis favorable à P.-L. Weiller et qu'il l'a appuyé. Mais l'intervention du Ministère de l'Air arrête tout, ce qui paraît bien soulager le Ponce Pilate. Je réponds.³

It would be of no more than anecdotal interest to chart his every adverse comment on Pétain and the Vichy régime throughout the rest of the Occupation. Suffice it to say that his attitude towards the Marshal continued to show all the bitterness of a man betrayed. It is evident that for Claudel, Pétain's crime lay not only in the iniquity of the policies he endorsed but also in his

1. Jo. II, p.361, (22 May 1941).

2. For hostility towards Pétain, see *ibid.*, pp.371, 374, 377, 378, and *passim* thereafter; and towards Darlan, *ibid.*, pp.363, 364, 371, 374, 378, 383, and *passim* thereafter.

3. *ibid.*, pp.375 - 376, (Oct. 1941).

public attitude of defeatism. In other words, as head of State he had openly debased his country, both in its own eyes, and in the eyes of the world. Worse still, the real France had been gagged: it had no means of overtly dissociating itself from the traitors who claimed to represent it. This is an idea which emerges clearly in a number of his writings both during and immediately after the Occupation. In this context, one particular statement by the Marshal was to stick in his mind. It had been made in a speech to young officers in September 1942, when, after emphasising that France was a defeated nation, Pétain had supposedly added: "Ce qui nous dispense d'avoir des prétentions".¹ A year later, in the poem "La France parle", these words would again be quoted in an evocation of the humiliation and impotent anguish inflicted on France by the cowardice of her leaders:

On s'est assis sur mon coeur et j'entends quelqu'un
qui parle à ma place / Quelqu'un qui parle sinistrement
à ma place et qui s'exerce à répéter chaque matin / Que
c'est bien fait, et que c'est moi la coupable, et que
j'ai tout mérité, et que tout espoir est mensonge, on l'a
éteint, / Et que pour être tout à fait bien dans la honte,
il n'y a qu'à s'y installer pour de bon. / "Quand on est des
vaincus, chère Madame, ça dispense d'avoir des prétentions".²

Besides the comments in his diary and his one or two poems, the same feeling of shame is evident in two letters that he wrote to de Gaulle in the autumn of 1944. There too we find references to "le goût de la honte", to "ces quatre ans d'indicible humiliation",

1. *ibid.*, p.413, (Sept. 1942). Compare, for example, his reaction when Giraud escaped from prison in April 1942: "Quelle joie de trouver enfin un héros parmi toutes ces déchéances, toutes ces hontes, toutes ces humiliations!" (*ibid.*, p.397).

2. "La France parle", *Po.*, p.588.

and specifically to those same lines in Pétain's speech.¹ Indeed, Claudel never forgave this betrayal by a man he had admired. After the Liberation he would join the campaign to save Brasillach from execution; he would visit Benoist-Méchin in prison, and even, it seems, show sympathy for Rebatet.² But in March 1948, when General Hering asked him to support a move for Pétain's release from the Ile d'Yeu, Claudel flatly refused.³

E. Did Claudel Resist?

Raymond Brugère, who used to visit Claudel at Brangues from time to time during the Occupation, has maintained that: "Dès 1940, Brangues fut dans la région lyonnaise un centre de résistance connu, repéré, fréquenté".⁴ Since M. Brugère is no longer alive, it is impossible to obtain a clearer idea of what exactly he meant by this statement, but on the evidence available, his words seem highly exaggerated unless we interpret the word resistance in the broadest possible sense as an attitude of mind. In any case, the date 1940 is surprising since we have already seen that Claudel was almost certainly loyal to Vichy - albeit with reservations - until mid-1941. Moreover, it is important to remember that Claudel himself never made any claim to have been involved in resistance work of any type whatsoever. After the war, in letters to de Gaulle, he laid stress on his Algerian adventure and on the fact that his son-in-law had

1. Letters to de Gaulle, 30 Sept. and 18 Oct. 1944, Dossier de Gaulle. See also "Liberté, liberté chérie", Pr., p.1348.
2. See Jo. II, pp.510, 589, 703.
3. ibid., p.633, (20 March 1948).
4. Raymond Brugère, "Le Diplomate: quarante-trois années au service de la France", CPC IV, p.345.

joined the General in 1941, but he said nothing more beyond admitting that he had at first been taken in by Pétain.¹ What is more, in 1952 he was to state categorically: "J'ai le regret de n'avoir appartenu à aucune organisation de Résistance".² Claudel was no more modest than the next man: if he had had any claims to make, he would surely have made them, if only to counterbalance his ode to Pétain.

On the other hand, at one point Claudel did incur the displeasure of the Vichy authorities. In the later months of 1941 he had been disgusted by Vichy's drift towards totalitarianism, as manifested in the suppression of the Catholic syndicats, the Riom trials, and Pétain's ignominious call for Frenchmen to hand over résistants to the Germans.³ Furthermore, although his own attitude still showed traces of residual antisemitism,⁴ he saw himself as a friend of the Jews and, having previously opposed Nazi racialism before the war, he was even more appalled by the sufferings of the Jews in his own country now - his awareness of this issue no doubt heightened by the fact that Weiller was Jewish.

From as early as May 1941, before Vallat's more sweeping measures were passed, Claudel had known that the iniquitous procedures of administrative internment and loss of nationality were being applied to large numbers of Jews.⁵ As the months passed, he

1. See letter to de Gaulle, 18 Oct. 1944, Dossier de Gaulle; also Pr., p.1348 for a post-war reference to his tranquil life at Brangues.

2. Éloge de Lyon, Pr., p.1342.

3. See Jo.II, pp.375, 378 and passim thereafter.

4. See Jo.II, p.321, (6 July 1940), where he associates Jews, among others, with the "parti radical et anticatholique" which he hopes to see destroyed.

5. See Jo.II, p.358, (8 - 10 May 1941).

had been further horrified to learn that the Germans were now shooting Jewish and Communist hostages in reprisal for acts of resistance. After one such atrocity in late October 1941, he had written to Cardinal Gerlier demanding that the Church should openly condemn the massacres, but Gerlier had replied with "une lettre lamentable".¹ Meanwhile, Cardinal Baudrillart was still calling for collaboration with the Germans. Thus, Claudel's bitterness was understandable when he wrote in his diary for 14 December:

"Stuelpnagel fait fusiller 100 ôtages à Paris. Mais ce ne sont que des juifs, des communistes et des anarchistes! Alors le cardinal Baudrillart doit être content!"² Finally, the strength of his feelings led him to write to Isaïe Schwartz, Chief Rabbi of France, to express his friendship for the Jews. In it he stated at one point:

Je tiens à vous écrire pour vous dire le dégoût, l'horreur, l'indignation qu'éprouvent à l'égard des iniquités, des spoliations, des mauvais traitements de toutes sortes, dont sont actuellement victimes nos compatriotes Israélites, tous les bons Français et spécialement les catholiques.³

To send such a letter could have been dangerous in itself, though it appears from his diary that he had not anticipated copies of it being widely circulated as a tract, which was what actually occurred in January 1942.⁴ Be that as it may, it happened that this incident coincided with Weiller's escape from France, and the combination of these two factors brought Claudel to the attention of both the Ministry of the Interior and the Commissariat Général

1. *ibid.*, p.380, (11 Nov. 1941).

2. *ibid.*, p.382.

3. Letter to Isaïe Schwartz, 24 Dec. 1941, in CPC VII, p.325.

4. See Jo. II, p.388, (13 Feb. 1941).

aux Questions Juives, resulting in a search of his home, the tapping of his phone, and a period of surveillance on his movements.¹

However, an undated report on him - almost certainly drawn up at the time - suggests that he was not regarded as being directly involved in any subversive activities. It described him as "anglophile et gaulliste" in his views on foreign policy,² and pointed out that he had had contacts with a number of former diplomats and political figures of the Republic, including Édouard Herriot. But it also stated that he seemed devoted to Pétain, that he very rarely left Brangues and that he was not associated with "les gens du pays".³

Except as regards his attitude to the Marshal, the report fits the facts as we know them. It is true that he was anxiously awaiting an Allied victory, and it was also natural that he should maintain his links with men he had known in diplomatic or political circles before the war, especially when they, like himself, had followed Pétain at the outset but had later become disillusioned: such was the case with Emmanuel Monick and René Massigli, for instance, both of whom were to become prominent Gaullists - the former working in France and the latter eventually escaping to England - with Claudel's knowledge and support.⁴ Furthermore, he was also in contact with

1. See "Dossier des services du gouvernement de Vichy", in CPC VII, pp.325 - 333.

2. Unsigned, undated report, in *ibid.*, p.330.

3. *ibid.*, p.331.

4. See Emmanuel Monick, Pour mémoire, privately published (printed by Firmin-Didot), 1971, p.111; and Brugère, *art. cit.*, CPC IV, p.346. It seems probable that Brugères's meaning of resistance in this article refers to the "libres propos" which were exchanged at Brangues, "alors que planait encore dans l'esprit de certains quelque doute sur l'issue victorieuse de la guerre". (*id.*).

Pierre Brisson and Maurice Noël of Le Figaro, in which he had continued to publish articles, and which he would describe to Ramuz in May 1942 as "le refuge de tous les écrivains qui pensent encore librement et l'organe de tous ceux qui nourrissent la même pensée unconquered".¹

Obviously, in the case of a paper surviving under strict censorship, to resist was to fight for the right not to print certain things in which its writers did not believe. This was what Claudel saw as its dignity.² And his words were, indeed, to be borne out in November 1942, after the German invasion of the Free Zone, when Le Figaro was banned sine die for refusing to condemn the Allied invasion of North Africa.³ In the very last issue of its literary supplement appeared a quatrain written by Claudel on the recent birth of his grand-daughter, named Marie-Victoire because her arrival had coincided with the Allied landings. The chronicler in the paper, having hinted at the "actualité" of the verse, then quoted: "Ce petit poisson dodu / Appelé Marie-Victoire / Sans dents comme il a mordu / A l'hameçon de l'histoire".⁴ Claudel had presumably given his approval for these lines to be quoted: it was a small gesture, but not altogether without significance given the presence of the Germans and the general circumstances of the time.

It is clear that he viewed himself as one of the spiritually

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1. Letter to Ferdinand Ramuz, 7 May 1942, ASPC, Dossier Ramuz.
 2. id.
 3. See C. Bellanger, Histoire générale de la presse française, Vol. IV, Paris, PUF, 1975, p.83.
 4. In Le Figaro littéraire, 21 Nov. 1942.

unconquered. But on the other hand there is no evidence that he ever participated in the writing of tracts or other clandestine publications, nor that his connections with active Gaullists went beyond friendship, moral support and perhaps occasional shelter. According to Brugère, Claudel did receive a personal invitation from de Gaulle to join him in May 1942, but the fact that he did not go, because of his age or whatever, supports the impression that he was a sympathiser rather than a participant in resistance work.¹

His caution could possibly be attributed to his belief that the Germans held a particular grudge against him. Be that as it may, cautious he was. After the search of his home early in 1942 following his letter to the Chief Rabbi and the escape of Weiller, he wrote an outraged letter to Barthélemy protesting at this insult to his "honneur de bon Français et de fonctionnaire" and stating somewhat ambiguously that everyone knew his feelings "à l'égard des principes qui font actuellement la force et la prestige du Gouvernement de la Restauration nationale".² Despite the sarcastic tone of the letter, it still gave itself to be the protest of an innocent, loyal subject. Obviously there was no question of his risking an open breach with Vichy. On the contrary, whatever his real feelings towards the Government it still remained the only power capable of affording some measure of protection against the Occupation authorities. Thus, in May 1943, when he heard that some Germans had recently made enquiries about him at his old flat in Paris, his immediate reaction was: "Je file pour Vichy où je mets les gens au courant. Ils me disent de ne pas m'effrayer".³ Assuming that the "gens" to whom he was

1. Brugère, art. cit., p.346.

2. Letter to Joseph Barthélemy, 11 March 1942, Dossier Weiller.

3. Jo. II, p.452, (12 May 1943).

referring were officials rather than fellow-conspirators, this might have been a clever piece of bluff, if Claudel really had been involved with resistance work. But it seems more likely that it was simply the act of a frightened man with little to conceal, and fired by a strong desire to live to see the end of the war.

F. Claudé Accused

As against the résistant side of Claudel's thinking, we are obliged to weigh two charges made against him by Charles Maurras after the Liberation. The first, and far less important of these allegations related to the production of Le Soulier de satin at the Comédie-Française in December 1943. A few days before the first performance of what was to be one of the major theatrical events of the Occupation, Claudel had given an interview to Marcel Bonnissol of the German-financed Paris-Soir. In the course of this meeting, the conversation had turned to the subject of diplomacy and Claudel, defending a direct, honest approach, was quoted as saying: "A mon goût, le plus grand diplomate fut Bismarck: brutal peut-être, mais il était clair".¹ Maurras cited this remark in 1945 to show that Claudel would go to any lengths to curry favour with the Germans and ensure the success of his play, even if it meant praising "le bourreau de 1871".² And the accusation had continued:

Huit jours plus tard, toute la fine fleur des revers amaranthe et des habits coupés à la boche, assistait à la première représentation du Soulier de satin.

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1. Marcel Bonnissol, "En marge du Soulier de Satin", Paris-Soir, 30 Nov. 1943.
 2. Charles Maurras, Réponse de Charles Maurras à Paul Claudel, Paris, Éds. de Midi, 1945, p.26.

A la fin de la pièce, Claudel vint sur le plateau et dit sa gratitude à l'assistance choisie qui l'acclamait.¹

Maurras had his own pressing reasons for wishing to discredit Claudel.

When Maurras had been brought to trial in January 1945, written testimony from Claudel - that Maurras had denounced him to the Germans - had helped to convict him of the crime of "intelligence avec l'ennemi"². But the interview had been printed as he claimed and Claudel had, in fact, stood rapturously on stage bowing to the applause of an audience of large numbers of German officers and leading collaborators.³ In defence of his interview, however, we should

1. id.

2. For the complete transcript of the trial, see Le Procès de Charles Maurras, Paris, Albin Michel, 1946. For the background to Claudel's testimony, see Jo.II, p.496, (17 Sept. 1944): "Le Préfet Yves Farge m'apprend que Charles Maurras m'a dénoncé 2 fois à la Gestapo". (Farge had recently been going through back numbers of A.F. and remembered having seen articles about Claudel). No evidence was produced at the trial to support the written testimony given by Claudel, and Maurras subsequently sued him for defamation. The suit was finally heard in 1954, by which time Maurras was dead, but was represented by his family. The verdict went in Claudel's favour, since his lawyer, Georges Izard, had managed to trace articles in L'Action française attacking Claudel during the Occupation - rumouring that he had helped Weiller to escape, pointing to his pro-Jewish sympathies, and, later, drawing attention to the quatrain to Marie-Victoire (see A.F., 29 March, 15 Sept., 26 Nov. 1942) - hardly denunciations, but certainly malicious and extremely dangerous in the climate of the time. Documents and correspondence relative to the trial and lawsuit are in ASPC, Dossier Charles Maurras: see also, Jo.II, pp.497-500 and passim thereafter.

3. See Le Boterf, op.cit., Vol.I, pp.241-249; Robert Cardinne-Petit, Les Secrets de la Comédie-Française, 1936-1945, Paris, Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1958, pp.274, 278-279; Henri Amouroux, La Vie des Français sous l'Occupation, Paris, Arthème Fayard, 1961, pp.466-468, for background. Also, Jean-Louis Barrault, Souvenirs pour demain, Paris, Seuil, 1972, pp.158-165.

remember that his admiration of Bismarck's diplomacy was both genuine and of long standing: in fact, he had described him before the war in an article for Les Nouvelles littéraires as "le plus remarquable diplomate que l'Histoire ait contemplé".¹ Yet we are left to wonder at his choice of that particular occasion in 1943 to air this opinion again. As to the possible equivocality of allowing himself to be acclaimed by that particular audience, or even of letting the play be produced at a state-owned theatre in the first place, the question could be debated ad infinitum in the context of the whole situation of the performing arts in France at that period. All that can be said here is that there is no evidence of Claudel admitting to any doubts on the subject, either then or later.

The second charge related to Claudel's link with Gnome et Rhône, and was of a far more serious nature, for it amounted to an accusation of economic collaboration. Maurras, in fact, described his old enemy as the equivalent of "un marchand de canons"² and, having raised the idea of arms-dealing with all its emotive implications, went on to claim: "M. Paul Claudel, administrateur de Gnome et Rhône a bénéficié de sommes provenant d'une société qui - volens nolens - a travaillé pendant quatre ans pour l'armée allemande".³

Objectively, the allegation was correct: Gnome et Rhône had restarted production not long after the beginning of the Occupation

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1. "L'Année 1912", (Les Nouvelles littéraires, 8 Feb. 1936), CPC IV, p.242.
 2. Maurras, op. cit., p.26.
 3. ibid., p.27.

and had actually produced engines for the Luftwaffe. Claudel, as one of its directors, had been a party to the decisions that were taken. However, as was so often the case during that period, the issues were far more complex than they at first appear.

Whether or not Maurras was aware of it, the matter was already under official scrutiny. Verdier, the firm's managing director during the Occupation, had been arrested in September 1944, and on 2 December of the same year, Claudel had been summoned to Paris by one of his fellow-directors because there was not only "une affaire Verdier" but also "une affaire Gnome et Rhône".¹ This was to be the beginning of an investigation which would drag on for over four years before it finally ended in a general acquittal (though the firm was nationalised in 1945).² Without access to the official findings, it would be beyond the scope of this study to go into the whole tortuous process in detail, but in view of Claudel's supposedly pro-British, anti-German outlook, to say nothing of his avowed

1. Jo. II, p.503, (2 Dec. 1944).

2. See *ibid.*, p.513, (9 April 1945), and *passim* thereafter for references to the case. Also, "Ordonnance No.45 - 1086 du 29 mai 1945 portant transfert à l'Etat d'actions de la Société anonyme des moteurs Gnome et Rhône", Journal Officiel, No.126, 30 May 1945, p.3082, in which the directors of the firm were accused, among other charges, of devoting themselves to satisfying the needs of the Germans in order to line their own pockets, with the result that the firm had become "le fournisseur de confiance et quasi-exclusif" of the Luftwaffe. We might therefore note the inaccuracy of Robert Aron's brief account of the nationalisation, where he writes: "Aucun motif n'était donné officiellement pour cette expropriation des actionnaires. Mais d'après des communications faites à la presse, l'attitude des dirigeants sous l'Occupation aurait été incriminée". (Histoire de l'épuration, Vol. 3, Part 1, Paris, Arthème Fayard, 1974, p.41. It is also unfortunate that Aron produced no evidence to support his contention that Claudel was in any case above reproach (*id.*)).

contempt for collaboration, his actions evidently need some explanation.

His answer, in testimony to the juge d'instruction on 15 December 1944 and in subsequent statements signed collectively with fellow-directors, was that the Board's decision had been taken in all conscience under impossible circumstances.¹ When the Germans invaded France they had seized the Gnome et Rhône factories in and around Paris as war prizes, and by September 1940 had already started to move quantities of machinery and parts back to Germany. The fear of the firm's directors had been that after shipping out the equipment, the Germans would also take the labour force of 14,000 men as well.

He claimed that it would have been easy for the directors to abandon both men and machinery, since the company had sufficient capital at its disposal to safeguard the interests of the shareholders. However, if they did so, they would be giving the Germans a vital economic instrument which would be brought up to maximum production immediately. Conversely, it would have deprived France of its most

1. This information is synthesised from documents relating to the case in ASPC, Dossier Gnome et Rhône: among these were, "Déposition de M. Paul Claudel", 15 Dec. 1944, (testimony to Marcel Martin, juge d'Instruction at the Cour de Justice du département de la Seine); undated document "Le Rôle du Conseil d'Administration et du Comité consultatif et d'Etudes pendant l'Occupation"; undated document "Inexactitude des griefs sur lesquels est fondé l'Exposé des motifs de l'Ordonnance du 29 mai 1945 (J.O. du 30.5.45, p.3082)". See also Claudel, letter to de Gaulle, 17 June 1945, Dossier de Gaulle, in which Claudel also declares his innocence.

important aero-engine plant. And furthermore, even if the work-force were not deported, it would have led to a massive number of men being unemployed. It had therefore been decided to keep the firm in French hands, carrying out only those German orders that were approved by Vichy, and producing as slowly and inefficiently as possible.

The motivation behind the policies adopted could not, he maintained, be gauged from the Board's minutes or correspondence, since these had been doctored to mislead the Germans, who could gain access to them at any time. However, Claudel argued that the policy of passive resistance could be judged by its results. Although the labour force had eventually been increased by 11,000 men, the firm had only produced some 8,000 motors for the Germans instead of the 25,000 that could have been expected even if it had only maintained its pre-war production level. Moreover, shelter and employment had been provided for large numbers of outlaws, such as Jews and escaped prisoners; clandestine deliveries of parts had been made to the Free Zone; and motorbikes had been supplied to the Resistance. Finally, Claudel added that he himself had gained no pecuniary advantage from the firm other than his dividends - which had in fact dropped from 290,000 francs in 1940 to 220,000 francs in 1943 despite the devaluation of the franc - and 4,000 francs per year for attendance at board meetings.¹

In fact, we are not really concerned here with the practical

1. In fairness, it must be said that this nevertheless represented nearly sixteen times the annual income of a manual worker during that period, and some five and a half times that of a bank clerk (see Amouroux, *op. cit.*, pp.162 - 163).

results of the firm's delaying tactics. After all, deliberately slowing production and even giving clandestine aid to the Resistance could simply have been one of the many forms of attentisme so widely practised during those years. In any case, it did not alter the fact that Gnome et Rhône had still produced a large number of engines for the Luftwaffe. The central issue then, for our purposes, is Claudel's personal motivation and its possible implications for his political views. Yet again, however, we are confronted with a lack of additional evidence to either support or refute his own subsequent explanation. There is no mention of the question in his diary at any point. Nor do his letters to Weiller really shed light on the issue. They show that he was determined to defend his friend's interests against enemies within the firm, and they support his own admission that he knew the firm would have to take German orders if it restarted production. But his only comment on the advisability of this decision was made while discussing the internal politics of the Board. After alluding in veiled terms to the controversy over Weiller, which was continuing among the directors, he wrote:

Mais je dois dire que les remarques de Verdier me faisant part des objections personnelles à votre égard des Allemands et du travail auquel la Société sera obligé de se livrer m'ont paru très fortes. Je crois en effet que la Société doit subsister comme elle pourra et que la réduire à un rôle de conservation de ses capitaux serait extrêmement dangereux.¹

Claudé did not expand on the question but turned straightaway

1. Letter to Weiller, 16 Oct. 1940, Dossier Weiller.

to pointing out Verdier's merits as future managing director, including the fact that he was known to the Germans. Thus, we remain unenlightened as to Claudel's view of the broader political and moral issues involved. Indeed, this is hardly surprising, whatever his feelings, since he was writing to Weiller in prison and would surely not have committed himself on such a dangerous subject if there was a possibility that his letter might be seen by eyes other than his friend's. Therefore, since Claudel was acquitted, since we cannot offer our own supplementary evidence, and unless we are to believe that the comments in his diaries or correspondence (his support for the Allied cause, his contempt for Vichyite collaboration, his view of himself as "unconquered") were all meaningless, we must naturally give him the benefit of any doubt. However, to accept his explanation still leaves an impression of inconsistency in his thinking. The disgust for Vichyite collaborationism in his diary is so absolute that it sits uneasily alongside his more flexible attitude in the case of Gnome et Rhône. Indeed, it is ironical that his retrospective justification of the decision to take orders for the Luftwaffe should have been based on much the same type of arguments as those used by the Vichyite leaders, the men he had so heartily despised, when they were brought to trial after the war.

G. The Ode to de Gaulle

When he heard on the radio that Paris had been liberated, Claudel shed tears of joy. Five days later, on 28 August 1944, American officers were drinking champagne with him at Brangues. On 17 September he set off for the capital where he was to spend the next fortnight

before making a trip to London. It was during his stay in Paris that he composed his ode to de Gaulle, which appeared in Le Figaro littéraire on 28 September only a few hours after it had been written.

The poem appears as much a plea for understanding as a song of triumph. It rings with a somewhat hollow defiance manifested in variations on the theme: "ce que les autres pensent de moi ça m'est égal!".¹ France, the mother, pays homage to her warrior son and offers herself to his embrace, while he, in his turn, brings her "La Volonté".² She explains to him that no matter what others may say, she has suffered no less than those who actually fought, since they had had "le goût de la bataille dans la bouche", whereas she had struggled alone and humiliated against "le goût de la mort".³

Was Claudel pleading for his country or for himself? Two days later he wrote to de Gaulle, expressing his admiration in the most glowing terms and painting a rather one-sided picture of his own position during the Occupation:

A l'heure où tout craquait, où la France savourait pour la première fois de son histoire le goût de la honte, vous êtes celui qui n'a pas faibli, qui avez planté ferme dans la terre le drapeau du ralliement, qui avez sonné l'appel du devoir et de l'espérance! Je revenais à ce moment de l'Algérie où j'espérais que la lutte allait continuer. Hélas! Dès mon retour à Brangues

1. "Au Général de Gaulle", Po., p.594.

2. ibid., p.595.

3. ibid., p.593.

mon vieux coeur tressaillait en entendant votre voix à la radio. Mon gendre Jacques Paris, Conseiller d'Ambassade, vous rejoignait en 1941. Mes deux fils, Pierre et Henri, sont en Amérique. Et moi, après ces quatre ans d'indicible humiliation, je vis encore pour saluer le plus beau jour de ma vie et le grand Français à qui je le dois!¹

On 18 October, after hearing a radio broadcast by the General on the previous day, Claudel wrote to him again in a tone of great enthusiasm. Most of the letter was devoted to giving his own suggestions as to how de Gaulle should govern the nation, but before he did so he made a confession of his early allegiance to Pétain. With the letter he also included a copy of his poem, explaining that it had been written in the sudden joy of seeing France rise from the ashes. Furthermore, he invited the General to attend a performance of Le Soulier de satin at the Comédie-Française, where the ode was to be declaimed during the interval!²

Claudel never felt the need to explain to the public why he had written the poem. Yet its existence alongside the "Paroles" is precisely what has led to accusations of opportunism and of a desire to whitewash his actions during the Occupation. Once again, there is no conclusive evidence to refute or confirm these charges. On the one hand, he undoubtedly had reason to be anxious about the past. His ode to Pétain was widely known since it had been declaimed in theatres throughout the Free Zone, whereas his private views in his diaries and unpublished poems were not known. Moreover, although he may not yet have been aware that there would be a full-scale "affaire Gnome

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1. Letter to de Gaulle, 30 Sept. 1944, Dossier de Gaulle.
 2. Letter to de Gaulle, 18 Oct. 1944, Dossier de Gaulle.

et Rhône", news of Verdier's arrest did reach him sometime between 19 and 29 September.¹ It would presumably have caused him some apprehension regardless of any belief in the justifiability of the Board's decisions. So, if he did learn of it before the 28th, it could have influenced him.

On the other hand, there is no reason to doubt that his admiration for de Gaulle was perfectly genuine. After all, the General did appear as the providential saviour of France - a charismatic military leader as Pétain had once been, a practising Catholic and a known believer in traditional values. Indeed, we shall see in the next chapter that Claudel had high hopes of the General's ability to rebuild France along lines of which he, Claudel, approved. What is more, it seems at least improbable that the poet was completely unaware of the likely reaction to his new ode. In fact, the passages which portray France defying the world could very easily be seen as Claudel defying his future denigrators. In support of this view we can point to his seemingly deliberate emphasis on the parallel between the two odes, firstly, by having "Au Général de Gaulle" recited at the Comédie-Française just as the "Paroles au Maréchal" had been at the Grand Casino in Vichy; and, secondly, by having both republished in the same collections in 1945 and 1947.²

1. See Jo. II, p.497, (Sept. 1944).

2. The editions in question were, Poèmes et paroles durant la guerre de Trente ans, Paris, NRF, 1945; Laudes, Brussels, Eds. de la Girouette, 1947.

H. Closing Remarks

In a poem which he wrote in 1945 to the memory of Paul Petit, a one-time friend of his who had been executed by the Germans, Claudel imagined a letter from a caricatural Vichyite explaining his country's position to the rebellious Petit. The fictitious writer declares that defeat is a fact, so the only choice is to follow the Marshal, even when he appears to co-operate with the victors. In any case, he argues, Pétain is no fool: he is bound to be preparing a plan to pull the wool over the German's eyes under the guise of collaboration, while he secretly rebuilds France from top to bottom. Frenchmen must accept the inevitable and make the best of it, especially since it has brought the benefit of authoritarian government. He also remarks:

Et d'ailleurs, je n'ai rien à dire là-bas contre cet autre général./ Il fait à Londres son travail, tout de même que de son côté à Vichy le fait notre Maréchal./ C'est avec la plus grande bienveillance que je suis ses efforts patriotiques, / Et s'il réussit, croyez-moi, je ne serai pas le dernier à crier: Vive la République! / C'est ainsi qu'en bon citoyen jadis, ennemi du désordre et de l'anarchie, / Rien au monde ne m'eût rendu royaliste que le rétablissement de la monarchie.¹

Was there, perhaps, an element of conscious or unconscious self-mockery in this acid portrait of the archetypal, Turelure-like attentiste? In the absence of conclusive evidence on many of the issues raised during this period, our discussion has posed more questions than it has answered, for Claudel's views and activities throughout the Occupation seem to reflect all the ambiguities,

1. "Paul Petit", Po., p.889.

contradictions and divided loyalties consequent upon his country's equivocal situation at the time. Moreover, it would be unrealistic to classify him in terms of the behaviour of a particular political or social group, since the issues of those years cut across traditional barriers, and in any case, as we have seen, the development of Claudel's opinions was strongly influenced by a number of personal factors; notably his involvement in the Weiller case.

However, it is as well to emphasise the obvious point that disillusionment with Vichy did not necessarily mean a complete revision of Claudel's whole political outlook. He had welcomed the Révolution nationale because he hoped that it would establish an authoritarian system based on traditional Catholic values. His later disaffection had resulted in part from Vichy's move away from neo-traditionalism towards outright totalitarianism in which any possibility of balance between the power of the State and the sanctity of the individual was destroyed. But this simply meant that Vichy had not lived up to Claudel's ideal. It did not mean that the ideal itself had been discredited in his eyes. We shall see in the next chapter that this was far from being the case.

CHAPTER VII. Short-Lived Dreams.

"Quelle joie d'avoir retrouvé l'honneur, d'avoir retrouvé la liberté, d'avoir retrouvé l'espérance.

L'espérance! Voilà le grand mot! Voilà le bien suprême, le bien incomparable, dont il faut à tout prix que ce pays de France ne soit plus jamais dépouillé. La liberté elle-même n'est si belle que parce qu'elle est la condition indispensable de l'espérance....

("Liberté, liberté chérie", Le Figaro, 28 Sept. 1944)¹.

Mais pendant quatre ans la France a été comme morte et l'on me permettra de considérer que le premier devoir d'un mort est de ressusciter. Pendant quatre ans nous avons vécu d'espérance. C'est cette espérance, c'est ce droit à l'espérance à tout prix à quoi nous ne voulons plus renoncer. Maintenant la France est debout et ce qu'on a détruit autour d'elle, ce sont ces parois qui l'empêchaient d'envisager l'avenir.

("Moi et nous", ibid., 14 Oct. 1944)².

An enormous sense of relief and an intense desire to believe in the future: Claudel shared these emotions with the majority of his compatriots in the immediate aftermath of the Liberation. Anger and the urge for revenge were also prominent in people's minds: in fact, Claudel himself bore a particular grudge against Pétain and Maurras. But, true to his belief in looking forwards rather than dwelling on the past - and encouraged in this, perhaps, by awareness that some of his own past actions might be criticised - the emphasis in his writings was on the opportunity, indeed the necessity for renewal. France had been morally and physically crushed, but with the reconquest of freedom must come the will to make a new start. He was already in his late

1. Pr., p.1349.

2. ibid., p.1353.

seventies at the end of the war: after a cataclysm of such proportions what more natural than the hope that he might see the foundations of a better society laid before he died?

A. A Co-operative Revolution?

In France after the Liberation, once public order had been more or less restored, the obvious priority was to start rebuilding the national economy, which had been totally dislocated. Normalising everyday life as far as possible and supporting the burden of re-entry into the war were the two most pressing needs. But beyond these immediate problems lay the question of long-term reconstruction and the possibility of innovative reorganisation. Naturally, Claudel was hostile to the left-wing programme of nationalisations and industrial democracy put forward by the Conseil National de la Résistance. He was even to oppose the less sweeping measures that were actually taken by the Provisional Government, for nationalisation in any form was to remain anathema to him. But he did believe that the time was right for proposing adventurous plans of his own.

One of the most striking characteristics of his thoughts in this field during the 1930s had been their vague and unco-ordinated (rather than deliberately pluralistic) nature: an apparent interest in economic planning, an ill-defined idea of industrial reorganisation, and attachment to the dream of the agrarian co-operative community - the three notions being linked only by his general desire for rational organisation productive of social harmony without threat to the principle of private ownership. By 1944, however, he had drawn his ideas closer

together, clarified them to some extent, and expanded them. Thus, he was ready to put them forward in a long series of articles for Le Figaro, offering them as an immediate, practical alternative to the Government's programme of nationalisations.

In May 1936, when Claudel had attacked the prospective extension of the public sector under the Front populaire, his explicit objection had been that the State was an inefficient, wasteful, impersonal manager.¹ He may well have believed that this was the case, but we might suppose that his opinion was also influenced by other factors. Not only was nationalisation associated in his mind with socialism: it also corresponded in a more general way to his fear of the type of organisation which eliminates the individual. At the same time, on yet another level, his loathing of "le Moloch étatiste" was surely reinforced by vested interest, since by 1936 he was already a director of Gnome et Rhône, a likely target for nationalisation, which was, in fact, threatened in July of that year.²

All of these considerations - and particularly the threat to Gnome et Rhône - still applied after the Liberation, though in his articles for Le Figaro the fact of his own involvement with private industry naturally did not figure. Nor indeed did he make great play with purely economic objections. He merely alluded briefly to factors such as the cost of compensation, the temporary loss of tax revenue,

1. See above, Chapter IV, p. 192.

2. See Jo. II, p. 148, (8 July 1936).

and the difficulty of co-ordinating an enlarged public sector with the private. Instead, he claimed to be speaking in the interest of the workers, who would, he argued, feel even less sense of involvement with their jobs. They would still be subject to wage-slavery but would now be faced with an even more powerful monolithic management. As for the panacea of worker representation on managerial bodies, this might lead to better material conditions for the labour-force, but it would not solve the basic problem of involving the workers in their tasks and giving them an incentive to produce their best.¹

Worker participation - widely demanded by the Left - raised the prospect of labourers influencing decisions in areas where they had no competence. It also meant the likelihood of increased power for the syndicats, and the possibility of class struggle being waged in the boardroom.² This was not stated in Claudel's articles, but he was certainly aware of it, since these views had recently been put to him by an acquaintance of his.³ On the other hand we need not doubt the sincerity of his desire to give the workers a sense of involvement and self-respect. This was an idea which we have seen recurring in his past writings, for it had three obvious attractions: from the moral angle it was in keeping with the Christian conception of the individual;

1. "Nationalisation et entreprise", (Le Figaro, 11 Jan. 1945), QNSP, pp.51 - 53. See also, "Étatisme et liberté", (11 Feb. 1945), Pr., p.1359; and "Le Droit à la charité", (17 March 1945), QNSP, p.84.
2. See Maurice Parodi, L'Économie et la société française de 1945 à 1970, Paris, Armand Colin, 1971, pp.42 - 43, for a brief discussion of right- and left-wing views of the comité d'entreprise.
3. See Roger Gasparetty, letter to Claudel, 8 Dec. 1944, in "Dialogue avec un ouvrier converti", L'Orient littéraire, 2 June 1962.

from the social point of view it would make for harmony as against class war; and from the economic standpoint it was likely to raise the level of production.

Claudel accepted that there should be no return to uncontrolled liberal capitalism. In fact, he seemed prepared to countenance a much greater degree of dirigisme than he had in the 'thirties, as long as ownership of the means of production remained in private hands. Thus, he did not merely talk of "un plan unique": he was now thinking in terms of "un contrôle sévère", by which he meant that the Government should draw up an economic programme which would be carried out under contract by private industry with close state supervision.¹ So, paradoxically, although he was defending the private sector, the type of plan he was prepared to accept as a partial substitute for nationalisation was not so much the plan indicatif which has been used in France since 1946, but was closer to the plan impératif that operated in the USSR.

This was not the main focus of his attention, however. He was far more concerned with discussing how the internal organisation of industrial firms could be developed along lines which he claimed were in keeping with the spirit of French socialism before it had been deformed by Marx's mechanistic theory of production. His ideal was, as before, communal effort, but it was now based on a theory of indirect rather than authoritarian management, described in glowing general terms as follows:

1. "Nationalisation et entreprise", QNSP, p.54.

...1. **A**telier organisé où des individualités responsables exercent leur liberté dans une communauté d'efforts suscitée à la fois par le bien général et l'avantage particulier, et où le rôle du patron est submergé dans celui du chef, du chef d'équipe, du chef d'équipes superposées.¹

This did not sound so very different from his description of industrial management in the Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher - a point that is revealing of the fact that his overall objectives had not changed.² But the method had certainly developed. To enable everyone to earn more, and to increase job satisfaction, he advocated the general application of a type of co-operative organisation. The traditional form of management and the normal wage system would be replaced by a structure in which the capitalist would still own the means of production but his workforce, grouped into teams, would negotiate with him to reach a price for "un certain résultat du travail", and then make more or less profit according to the efficiency with which they reached the agreed target.³ Each team would be responsible for its own internal organisation and for the subsequent division of earnings relative to each member's contribution. The role of management would therefore be reduced, supposedly, to obtaining orders from clients and co-ordinating the output of their semi-autonomous groups of workers.⁴

Before we comment on this theory, let us first add that Claudel's enthusiasm for this system linked with his belief that co-operative

1. ibid., p.55.

2. See Pr., pp. 689 - 690, and above Chapter IV, pp. 180, 184.

3. "Le Droit à l'espoir", (3 March 1945), Pr., p.1361.

4. See QNSP p.72.

principles should be widely applied to other areas of activity within the national reconstruction programme. The four years he had spent at Brangues during the Occupation had sharpened his interest in rural life again and his old idea of the community farm now had its wider extension in the conception of whole villages reorganised on co-operative lines. If the individualism of the peasantry - "toute cette sauvagerie réfractaire"¹ - could be overcome by education, then the co-operative commune could rationalise agriculture, arrange credit and insurance schemes as well as housing, medical services and cultural activities. It could deal directly with co-operatives in the towns, thereby creating a stable market, while cutting out the middle-men. Furthermore, he even alluded to the notion of a federal council of communes taking over the role formerly played by the Senate, to give real representation of local interests and counterbalance the centralised state.²

A number of points need to be made here. Firstly, it goes without saying that in general terms Claudel's views were by no means original. The co-operative movement, as such, was as deeply-rooted in France as it was in Britain and, diverse as it was, could claim among its early theorists men like Fourier, Considérant, Buchez, Louis Blanc, or more recently, Charles Gide and the Nîmes School. Admittedly, there had been no sign of the peaceful co-operative revolution awaited by its more utopian exponents, but the movement had remained established in

1. "L'Instituteur", Le Figaro, 28 Oct. 1944, (not reprinted).

2. See "Vive la commune", (26 June 1945), QNSP pp. 109 - 113.

many various forms.¹ It had not only continued to survive under the Occupation, but its importance had also been marked by the fact that the Resistance charter had contained a demand for the further establishment of producers' and consumers' co-operatives - though not as a substitute for extension of the public sector.²

At first sight it might seem that Claudel himself was calling for something very close to a complete economic and social revolution. There was no idea of obligation to participate in the various co-operatives, but if they did become as widespread as he obviously envisaged, then it would ultimately be in everyone's interests to do so. He may indeed have imagined it in this way - the birth, without violence, of a truly organic society in which individual and collectivity would be in harmony, in accordance with the general principles which he had reaffirmed once again in October 1944:

Il n'y a pas liberté quand il n'y a pas pratiquement usage et usage aussi continuél que possible de la liberté, secondé par un sentiment aussi étendu que possible de la responsabilité, du devoir et de l'honneur. La fonction du citoyen libre est une chose qui s'apprend et qui ne s'apprend que par l'exercice. Le Français ne demande pas seulement la justice, il ne demande pas seulement le moyen de vivre et d'assurer à sa famille des conditions convenables de subsistance, il demande le droit d'agir, d'employer ses facultés en vue d'un but supérieur et d'une utilité générale, il demande, en dehors de cette justice automatique qui consiste dans l'évaluation et la distribution de services réciproques, le droit de se sentir non seulement utile mais nécessaire, d'être le propriétaire d'un certain bien qu'il est capable de faire à ses semblables. Il demande la constitution autour de lui d'une certaine aire d'action autonome à la portée de ses mains. Il demande le droit

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1. For the origins and development of the international co-operative movement see, for example, Margaret Digby, The World Co-operative Movement.
 2. See A. Werth, France 1940 - 1955, pp.222 - 223 for details of the CNR charter.

d'exister pour les autres en vertu de lui-même. L'individu et la collectivité ne sont pas en contradiction l'un de l'autre. Au contraire le développement de l'individu est fonction de la collectivité à laquelle il est adapté. A lui seul il n'a pas la force de se défendre et de croître.¹

It would be fruitless to speculate further on the extent to which he would really have wished to see society and the economy transformed. However, we should note here that when he first started writing his articles he was not putting forward a homogeneous co-operative system, nor indeed did he claim to be doing so. Although definitions of the co-operative enterprise differ as to details, the fundamental definition is that it is an association of people, who have joined together voluntarily to achieve a common purpose by exchange of services, through a shared economic enterprise, with resources to which all contribute, and the risks of which are borne collectively.² Claudel had mentioned three forms of co-operation: consumers' co-operatives, co-operative services, and what is widely known in France as the coopérative de travail. He did not go into the detail of how he saw the first two being organised, but they would presumably have corresponded to the definition above. But the coopérative de travail occupies a more ambiguous position.

It is not certain when he had first come across the idea, but as we saw in an earlier chapter, one of his letters to Francisque Gay in 1936 shows that he already knew of an example of this system - the

1. "Moi et nous", (14 Oct. 1944), Pr., p.1353.

2. See M. Digby, *op. cit.*, pp.7 - 9.

Russian artel.¹ Whether or not he fully understood it at that time, the method of organisation had appealed to him, though he had emphasised that it should be privately financed. As we have suggested previously, it is therefore possible that he had already met Hyacinthe Dubreuil, the sociologist whom he would describe in 1944 as "une espèce de génie".² Dubreuil was certainly the inspiration behind Claudel's articles on the coopérative de travail after the war, for Claudel readily admitted that he was basing himself on Dubreuil's A chacun sa chance, (Paris, 1935) which had shown how the system was already being operated successfully under different labels in several countries, including France, where it was widely used in the printing industry.³

Claudel had claimed that this system was in keeping with the spirit of the early French socialists, and no doubt we could point to certain common threads, since it was a practice which had grown out of the worker movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. But in contemporary terms it was not only far from being a socialist idea, as such; it was not even a full-blooded co-operative. It was a neo-capitalist compromise; hence its appeal to a progressive group like the Jeunes Patrons, who were willing to buy the collaboration of their workers by higher pay, improved conditions and more humane treatment.⁴

1. See letter to Gay, 30 June 1936, Dossier Gay, and above Chapter IV , p. 195.

2. Letter to Gasparetty, 19 Oct. 1944, loc. cit.

3. "Le Droit à l'espoir", Pr., p. 1362.

4. See H. Dubreuil, "Le Travail et l'éducation sociale", a document published by the Centre des Jeunes Patrons in June 1944, containing the text of a speech given by Dubreuil on 17 March 1944 to the Commission d'Études de l'Organisation et de la Rémunération du Travail du Centre des Jeunes Patrons: Copy in ASPC.

It did not threaten the existing system of ownership, nor did it attack the employer's profits, which might actually rise as a result of the added incentive for the labour-force to work as efficiently as possible. At the same time, it purported to reward the workers in proportion to their services, while offering them the psychological satisfaction of taking responsibility for organising their own teams, but barring them from the type of real control over policy decisions envisaged by the left-wing advocates of the comité d'entreprise.

This was a far cry from the true producers' co-operative, which is organised and entirely financed by its members. So it is clear that at the outset Claudel was by no means advocating the wholesale transformation of society on the basis of co-operative collectivism. It was simply to be a more efficient, social, and humane form of capitalism, whose activity would be co-ordinated by technocratic state planning. And as for its motive force, he would write in one of his earlier articles that "le grand ressort de l'activité humaine, à qui le bien de la société exige de laisser le plus de champ possible, est le profit".¹

However, it appears that his ideas were evolving while he was actually writing the series. This was presumably a result of further reading since he received many letters from readers and was recommended numerous sources of information by co-operators who

1. "Le Droit à l'espoir", Pr., p.1361.

welcomed the publicity he was bringing to the movement.¹ Thus, in one of his later articles on the subject in September 1945, he would suddenly announce that "d'après les ouvrages classiques" the aim of co-operation was optimum service rather than maximum profit, and he would go on to explain how a fully co-operative enterprise was financed:

Par suite l'entreprise coopérative tend à obtenir de ses membres eux-mêmes les capitaux nécessaires à son fonctionnement, mais en ne leur accordant (quand elle leur en accorde) qu'un intérêt limité indépendant des résultats de l'entreprise. Les excédants annuels, après prélèvement des réserves et frais généraux sont répartis sous forme de ristournes entre les membres.²

We are left to wonder whether he really favoured this idea or whether he had talked himself into a corner by standing as an advocate of co-operation in every sphere before he fully understood what it entailed. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in June 1946 he would still be preaching its merits as an antidote to the principle of class struggle and pointing out its essential compatibility with Christian

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1. See, for example, letters from A. Daudé-Bancel (editor of Correspondance coopérative), 7 Aug. 1945; Jean Adam (President of Les Presses artisanales), 27 June 1945; Charles Barbier (Director of L'Union suisse des coopératives de consommation), 14 June 1945; Georges Bouche-Villeneuve (Secretary-General of Indusco français), 6 June 1945; etc., all ASPC. See also two unsigned articles, one congratulatory, one hostile: "M. Paul Claudel défend les libertés", La Semaine du lait, 21 April 1945; "M. Paul Claudel", Les Informations industrielles et commerciales, 19 May 1945.
 2. "Le Mariage de la faim et de la soif", (10 Sept. 1945), QNSP, p.129.

precepts of justice and fraternal love.^{1.}

By that time, however, there was less chance than ever of its being implemented on a massive scale in the immediate future. It was perhaps for this reason that the subject dropped out of his writings. In fact, with the onset of the Cold War and the further polarisation of French society, it is not surprising that his only further public declaration on the Social Question should have been defensive, and reactionary in tone. In 1954 he vigorously supported the papal clampdown on the worker-priest movement. His condemnation of the priests' involvement in working-class politics had been followed by a predictable diatribe against Marxism, and an insubstantial appeal for employers and employees to realise their "intérêts communs" in a spirit of mutual understanding.^{2.} He did admit that the worker needed to be protected by the State, and by "la garantie que lui donne la solidarité", but there was no word of the type of reforms he had envisaged a few years earlier.^{3.}

1. See text of "Discours à la réunion des publicistes chrétiens", (10 June 1946), OC XVIII, pp.374 - 375.

2. "Le Point de vue de Claudel sur les prêtres-ouvriers", Le Figaro littéraire, 3 April 1954.

3. id.. See also the crushing reply by P.-H. Simon, "Paul Claudel et les prêtres-ouvriers", Le Monde, 7 April 1954.

B. A Political Friendship: Relations with de Gaulle

The other decisive question facing the French people immediately after the Liberation was the problem of how the country was to be governed. In its Ordonnance du 21 avril 1944 the Comité français de la Libération nationale had stated that a constituent assembly would be elected as soon as circumstances permitted, and that in the meantime there would be a "rétablissement progressif des institutions républicaines", including town councils, liberation committees in the départements, a provisional government and assembly.¹ Likewise, the Resistance charter had also called for the establishment of a provisional government as well as the reintroduction of universal suffrage and basic human rights.² But in those first months there was no certainty that all of those provisions would be observed. Might there not be a communist revolution? Or, if de Gaulle succeeded in containing the threat from the Left, might he not try to install himself permanently as a dictator? And assuming that a constituent assembly was eventually elected, what would it decide? Would France simply fall back on the tried and tested, but far from satisfactory institutions of the pre-war era?

In the event, it was to be the latter, but it was obvious from the start that Claudel's sympathies lay elsewhere. De Gaulle was the saviour of France and the guardian of her battered pride. More than

1. Reprinted in Georges Dupeux, La France de 1945 à 1965, Paris, Armand Colin, pp.70 - 72.

2. See A. Werth, op. cit., p.222.

that, he was a man of courage and strength - the type of leader whom Claudel believed he could follow. At this stage, the question of what policies the General might adopt was, in a sense, secondary to the values which he represented.

We saw in the last chapter that Claudel had sent two letters to de Gaulle in the first few weeks after the liberation of Paris. At the time, de Gaulle was still in the process of establishing his authority over the Resistance and restoring order throughout the country. In one of these letters, Claudel had delegated himself to speak on behalf of the nation in begging de Gaulle to hold onto the reins of power at all costs, and not to allow himself, on any pretext, to be deprived of the right to speak directly to the people. He called for a threefold "révolution", which would prevent power from being exercised as it had been "au temps du parlementarisme pur, de l'avocasserie et des maquignonnages de commission".¹

Drawing on his knowledge of Roosevelt's methods during the 1930s, he extolled the merits of the radio as an instrument for establishing a direct link between the leader and the people, "sans intermédiaire, sans le charivari de la contradiction".² It was not to be seen purely as a propaganda tool but more as a means of stimulating two-way communication, since the American experience had shown that broadcasts could stimulate vast quantities of correspondence in reply, and careful study of these by Roosevelt's staff had been an

1. Letter to de Gaulle, 18 Oct. 1944, Dossier de Gaulle.

2. id..

invaluable gauge of public opinion. In this way, Claudel believed, the leader could maintain real contact with "cette foule anonyme qui est la séance de l'autorité et du mouvement".^{1.}

It was evident that Claudel's experiences under Vichy had not altered his attachment to the idea of the strong leader whose authority emanates directly from the people, unobstructed by the barrier of parliamentary politics. Yet he clearly accepted that there would be a return to some form of democracy, for his second point was to advise de Gaulle that the coming years would be "une période où le vote des femmes aura une importance considérable et peut-être prédominante".^{2.} What is more, in an article written a fortnight earlier he had already stated his support for this extension of the franchise, in the context of a veritable eulogy of "la société démocratique", as against totalitarianism.^{3.} Admittedly, he had not been explicit as to how he conceived democratic society, except in the most abstract terms - for instance, as "un appareil conçu pour tirer de chaque individu, le maximum d'individualité, de chaque être humain, le maximum d'humanité...." - or in generalities, such as the need to develop a sense of civic responsibility rather than voting every few years "plus ou moins à l'aveuglette".^{4.} But the fact remains that he had written in a tone of considerable

1. id..

2. id. Claudel saw women as a potential moral force against vices such as alcoholism and prostitution. See also "Il est temps que les femmes s'en mêlent", Le Figaro littéraire, 31 Jan. 1948, for further comments on the role of women as moral advisers (implicitly, as a conservative influence).

3. "Moi et nous", Pr., p.1352.

4. ibid., pp.1352, 1353.

enthusiasm.

What are we to conclude from this, in view of its blatant contradiction of all his earlier views on the subject? Was it pure demagoguery at a time when any anti-democratic stance was tainted with the odour of Vichy? Another hypothesis might be that, whilst he still rejected parliamentary government and was drawn to the authoritarian figure of de Gaulle, the events of the previous four years had heightened his fear of totalitarianism, with the result that he genuinely wanted to ensure a measure of popular control over the State. The logical sum of this combination of ideas, when expressed in terms of the French political tradition, would be Caesarism, a plebiscitary presidential system on Bonapartist lines. We shall see later how far this matched up with his subsequent views.

The third point in his letter to de Gaulle related to the status of the Church. Looking back on the Occupation, he pointed out that the support given to Pétain by the French episcopate and many of the Catholic laity must be attributed to the unjust and humiliating way in which the Church had been treated since the abrogation of the Concordat. Given the disastrous results of the State's inhumane policies in the past, he urged that this situation should be rectified, especially since so many Catholics had nevertheless played an outstanding part in the Resistance. He claimed that the State now had an ideal opportunity to set its relations with the Church "sur des bases satisfaisantes et stables".¹ The implication was that

1. Letter to de Gaulle, 18 Oct. 1944, Dossier de Gaulle.

there should be a new Concordat or something very much like it.

We do not possess a record of how the General received these suggestions, but they were hardly of a nature to affect his policies. He had already shown himself more than adept in the use of the radio, and he had recently confirmed that women would be given the vote, so he can scarcely have been unaware of its implications.¹ As to the third proposal, it would surely have appeared highly unrealistic, since, although a Catholic himself, de Gaulle's main concern at the time, and later, was for national unity, which would obviously not have been enhanced by raising such a divisive issue.

Although we do not know what political views the two men may have exchanged over the months that followed, Claudel's diary indicated that there were at least sporadic contacts between them, either by letter or, on one occasion, a dinner together.² The relationship must have been cordial, because when the punitive nationalisation of Gnome et Rhône was announced in the Journal officiel in May 1945 - the order being signed by Charles Tillon, René Plevin and de Gaulle - Claudel sent the General a plea of innocence which contained the words: "non, mon général, le vieil homme à qui vous avez bien voulu donner des marques répétées de sympathie n'est pas un malfaiteur et un traître".³

1. See text of his speech at the Palais de Chaillot on 4 Sept. 1944 in Discours et messages, Vol. I (June 1940 - Jan. 1946), Paris, Plon, 1970, p.447.

2. See Jo. II, pp.505, 513, 521.

3. Letter to de Gaulle, 17 June 1945, Dossier de Gaulle. De Gaulle noted on the letter: "ne pas répondre".

The fact that de Gaulle did not reply, and that the nationalisation proceeded, did not produce a permanent break in their relations, nor did it alter Claudel's political support for him. In September 1945 Claudel enthusiastically followed the General's appeal to vote "oui" to both questions in the referendum which led to the establishment of a constituent assembly of fixed duration.¹ Moreover, although he was disturbed at first to learn that the government formed in November included men like Tillon and Thorez - "ces communistes à gueules de marchands de vin, de maquereaux et d'assassins"² - he could at least console himself that representatives of all the social classes were united behind "l'homme, nous le sentons unique et indispensable, qui va prendre les rênes du pouvoir".³

Friendly relations were still maintained while de Gaulle was in the political wilderness after his resignation in January 1946.⁴ And despite the establishment of the Fourth Republic in October of that year, Claudel could still draw hope from the fact that the large percentage of the electorate which had voted against the Constitution, or abstained, could be seen as representing a triumph for de Gaulle.⁵

1. See letter to d'Ormesson, 11 Sept. 1945, Dossier d'Ormesson: "Le Général nous recommande de voter Oui Oui, mais bien des gens auraient envie de voter Oui Oui Oui!"

2. Jo. II, p.536, (Nov. 1945).

3. Letter to d'Ormesson, 16 Nov. 1945, Dossier d'Ormesson.

4. See Jo. II, pp.543, 545, 572 (de Gaulle was instrumental in having Claudel elected to the Académie Française. Claudel demanded Maurras's chair!). See also, de Gaulle, letters to Claudel, 17 Sept. 1946, 22 Nov. 1946, in "Documents inédits: Lettres à Paul Claudel", Espoir, 1, Sept. 1972, p.34.

5. Jo. II, p.572, (14 Oct. 1946).

The stage was therefore set for Claudel to become more closely involved with the General's cause after the launching of the RPF in April 1947. On the 30th of that month de Gaulle sent for him. It would seem from Claudel's diary that the main object of the meeting had been to talk about foreign affairs. Claudel's views in this area will be discussed in detail in the next chapter: for the moment suffice it to say that de Gaulle seemed to agree, "sur tous les points", with his insistence on the need for a strong stand against communism, and for the building of a solid Western bloc including America.¹ It also seems that de Gaulle had it in mind to use him for a diplomatic mission, for Claudel noted: "Il.... me demande si je consentirais à aller à Rome, sans doute pour demander l'appui pour lui du Vatican".² In fact, Claudel refused on grounds of old age and ill-health, but the important point is that he left the meeting flattered and with his confidence in de Gaulle reinforced, for he concluded: "Il me paraît amer et désabusé, mais sûr du succès. Il me parle sur un ton amical et presque déférent. Nous nous séparons dans les meilleurs termes".³

This did not, however, lead Claudel to immediately commit himself to militating on the General's behalf. On the contrary, for the next five months he was to be based mainly at Brangues and seems to have been somewhat out of touch with de Gaulle's activities. But by the time he returned to Paris in early October the campaign for the municipal elections was at its height. On the 5th de Gaulle had

1. Jo. II, p.592, (30 April 1947).

2. id.

3. id.

made one of his most impressive speeches to a massive rally at Vincennes, warning against the political, social and economic chaos which threatened the country. He had lashed out at the inadequacy of the Constitution, the sterile machinations of the political parties and the subversive activities of the Communists. Then he had continued with his usual call for national unity and real government within a coherent State, to prepare France for the role of an independent Great Power at the head of Western Europe.^{1.}

As a political programme it was vague in the extreme, but as a piece of rhetoric playing on popular fears or grievances, and as a call for all true Frenchmen to rally to his leadership, it was masterly. Thus, while the Left railed against the threat of dictatorship, Claudel would write to de Gaulle in tones of the most fervent adulation:

Remercions Dieu qui nous donne un chef! (....). Ma grande joie, c'est que nous seulement, nous avons en vous un chef, c'est de sentir que dans tout l'Occident à cette heure solennelle, il n'y a pas un homme à votre taille et que vous êtes appelé à prendre le commandement de la barrière internationale.²

It appears that by this time de Gaulle had come to look on Claudel as a useful adviser, for his reply to him included the sentence: "J'espère avoir l'honneur de vous voir et de vous consulter lors du prochain voyage que je ferai à Paris après Alger".^{3.} But before their next meeting occurred, events had changed dramatically.

1. De Gaulle, Discours et messages, Vol. II, (Feb. 1946 - March 1958), Paris, Plon, 1970, p.126.

2. Letter to de Gaulle, undated (but refers specifically to the Vincennes demonstration), Dossier de Gaulle.

3. 9 Oct. 1947, Espoir, p.34.

The RPF had scored an enormous success in the municipal elections, and the question now was how to capitalise on the situation. On 27 October de Gaulle had further polarised opinion by challenging the Government to immediately dissolve the Chamber since it had lost the nation's confidence. He had even seemed to hint at a possible coup when he had declared that if the Government prevaricated further it would incur "des responsabilités littéralement écrasantes", while the RPF would save the nation "quoiqu'il arrive".¹

On the other hand, there were those among de Gaulle's supporters who favoured a less headlong approach and tried to guide him towards making a deal with the MRP and SFIO to secure the parliamentary majority necessary for calling a general election. Claudel, the pragmatist, was also thinking along the same lines when he finally saw de Gaulle on 31 October.² Showing himself to be a better, and more cynical tactician than the General, he saw it as pointless to waste energy in an intransigent campaign against the existing regime: the essential thing was to strike while the iron was hot and exploit the defects of the Constitution to de Gaulle's advantage. Revealingly, he twice drew on the example of Napoleon to show the merits of tactical flexibility and the ability to strike where it was least expected. The Constitution de l'An VIII had, he argued, been even more absurd than the present one. Moreover, the existing system had two advantages: firstly, the absence of an effective second Chamber on the model of the

1. Discours et messages, Vol. II, p.137

2. All of this paragraph, Jo. II, p.614, (31 Oct.1947).

former Senate of the Third Republic made it easy to act quickly; and secondly, through fear of dictatorship, the makers of the Constitution had made the presidency almost powerless, but enormous authority had been placed in the hands of the Président du Conseil if he had the backing of the Assemblée Nationale. The General should therefore do the unexpected and aim at the conquest of power by constitutional means, playing on the communist threat to win over the Socialists and moderates, while at the same time offering them "une inoffensive satisfaction d'amour propre" - their continued existence as deputies, their "place lucrative pendant cinq ans" - and giving them the opportunity to bask in his reflected glory. Whatever happened, he emphasised, de Gaulle must act now.

In the event, de Gaulle would not be swayed. Thus Claudel would note ruefully in his diary after their meeting:

Vu le G[énéral] q[ui] ne veut pas entendre parler de la Ch[ambre] actuelle. Elle sera obligée de se dissoudre comme il prétend qu'elle en a le pouvoir. Il attend la crise financière décisive.¹

History was to prove Claudel right, since de Gaulle's threatening stance had the counterproductive effect of driving all the party leaders not directly associated with him to rally to the Republic. Indeed, it has been said that when the conservative Robert Schuman was adopted as Premier on 22 November - elected by virtually every non-communist vote in the Assembly - the death knell of the RPF had already sounded.² This judgement is, of course, based on hindsight, and the decline of the Rassemblement was by no means apparent at the time.

1. *ibid.*, p.615.

2. See Aidan Crawley, De Gaulle, London, Collins, 1969, p.305.

Claudé had, meanwhile, shown that he had no time for de Gaulle's catastrophism. Still intent on producing immediate action at all costs, even if it meant a coup d'état, he returned to see the General on 7 November with further suggestions which took account of de Gaulle's refusal to have any truck with the present Chamber. This time Claudé had moved to the opposite viewpoint from his previous one, as may be judged from this summary of his "programme" in a letter he wrote on the 9th to his son Pierre:

1° Envisager le devoir politique actuel comme une opération d'ensemble, analogue au renflouement d'un navire, à opérer par des moyens purement industriels. D'où: autorité d'un chef et responsabilité de ses employés envers lui seul.

2° Prendre le pouvoir le plus tôt possible sans s'inquiéter des conditions constitutionnelles.

3° Gouverner non avec le Parlement, mais avec la Radio.^{1.}

If these views were extreme, we should remember the circumstances under which they were expressed. It was not simply a question of grasping a favourable opportunity for de Gaulle to take power. There was a sense of urgency undoubtedly prompted by the situation of France at the time. Jacques Fauvet has described June 1947 as opening "l'année terrible", and not without reason.^{2.} Despite the advent of Marshall aid, the Government had shown itself totally incapable of dealing with runaway inflation, with the result

1. Letter to de Gaulle, 9 Nov. 1947, Dossier de Gaulle.

2. Title of chapter in Jacques Fauvet, La IV^e République, Paris, Arthème Fayard, 1959, p.135 ff. See also A. Werth, op. cit., p.380 ff for most of the information here; and Jo. II, p.618 (Nov. 1947) for Claudé's comment on the strikes.

that the retail price index had risen from 856 to 1336 between January and November, while wages were lagging far behind. The country had been torn by strikes in both the public and private sectors, the level of industrial production was low, and there was a shortage of coal and raw materials. Moreover, since their departure from the Government in May the Communists had adopted an increasingly intransigent stance which had naturally fed fears of social revolution. Meanwhile, on the international front, the Cold War had created an atmosphere of extreme tension, and there were also serious problems in the French colonies. All of these factors had contributed to the RPF success in the municipal elections because there was a widespread belief - obviously shared by Claudel - that something had to be done immediately.

However, it is interesting to observe that in this atmosphere of crisis the old man's brutal side could still come strongly to the fore. Having found a leader whom he admired, and perhaps hoping for some share of the glory if de Gaulle came to power, Claudel was now prepared to advocate a course of action which was not merely illegal, but could easily have led to widespread violence, if not civil war. Secondly, it is significant that in this context we should find the trace of another fundamental strand in his thought. His use of the analogy with industrial management is surely no coincidence. When it came to the point, effective government, for Claudel, meant administration by a hierarchy of dedicated professionals, not the erratic rule of politicians.

Once again, however, Claudel's ideas did not result in action by de Gaulle. Although the General continued to sound menacing in his speeches, his refusal to actually attempt a coup would condemn him to the purely negative stance which was to keep him from power for so long. Be that as it may, for the first time in his life Claudel seemed to have abandoned his habitual wariness and was becoming closely involved with the cause of a man who was aiming at the conquest of power. Furthermore, de Gaulle continued to regard him with considerable favour, to the extent of trying to incorporate him into his entourage. On 15 November, Claudel was invited to dine at the house of Pasteur Vallery-Radot with de Gaulle and his lieutenants. While there, he was told by Soustelle that the General wanted to offer him "le commandement du secteur intellectuel".¹ So, in effect, Claudel had been designated as one of de Gaulle's shadow ministry - an honour which was to be confirmed in May of the following year when the General asked him to become a member of the RPF's Conseil National, on which only twenty out of over two hundred seats were in his personal gift. Claudel's reaction was noted in his diary for 5 May: "J'accepte. Je saisis cette occasion pour lui dire ce que je pense des partis qui sont en réalité des bandes déchaînées à la curée de la France".² More flattering still, when the time came for the first session of the Conseil two months later, de Gaulle offered him the chairmanship of those meetings which he could not attend himself.³

1. Jo. II, p.617, (15 Nov. 1947)

2. ibid., p.639

3. De Gaulle, letter to Claudel, 13 July 1948, Espoir, p.34.

But ironically, by then or very soon afterwards, Claudel was already starting to lose enthusiasm. It is clear from his diary, and from a letter sent to him by Léon Noël in August, that he had not attended the first session of the Conseil, and despite the fact that he was invited to chair the Commission des Affaires Étrangères for the next session in September, he cried off on grounds of prior engagements, his deafness, and lack of knowledge in the areas that were to be discussed.¹ From the evidence available, these excuses do not seem entirely convincing. His diary for the days in question suggests, by its very emptiness, that he spent the time quietly with his family at Brangués.² Equally, his deafness did not normally prevent him from attending functions if he wished to do so. And as for his supposed ignorance of the questions of foreign policy, we shall see in the next chapter that they were one of his most constant preoccupations. So, although he did accompany de Gaulle to a rally in Grenoble, which was not far from Brangués, on 18 May, it seems that he was showing a marked lack of commitment. Besides a growing area of difference on the question of policy towards Germany, the reason for this was, in fact, implied in the letter he sent to Noël conveying his excuses, for he added at the end:

Confidentiel

Je ne vous cacherai pas que je suis un peu déçu par les procédés du RPF. Le Général fait de magnifiques discours qui n'avancent pas à grand'chose, qui ne mordent pas, (comme on dit qu'un lion mord, ou qu'un engrenage mord). Pendant ce temps d'effroyables, de monstrueux

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1. Jo. II, pp.647 - 648, (July 1948). See Léon Noël, letter to Claudel, 28 Aug. 1948; Claudel, letter to Noël, 2 Sept. 1948, both ASPC, Dossier Léon Noël.
 2. See Jo. II, p.654, (20 - 25 Sept. 1948).

scandales se produisent, des vols avoués, des brigandages cyniques, où la sottise le dispute à la malhonnêteté, dans une assurance tranquille d'impunité. Les charbonnages, la SNECMA, l'électricité, l'aviation, etc., etc.. Pas un mot de protestation. Le RPF plane dans l'azur! ¹

He had gone on to point out that all of these scandals stemmed directly from "le régime des partis".² In other words, he was manifestly frustrated and disillusioned by the General's continued refusal to seize power and by the fact that the RPF as a whole seemed to be marking time. As he had already stated earlier in the same letter, he believed that the threat of communism at home and abroad made it futile to indulge in long-term theories. What was needed was "une politique d'urgence, une politique de salut publique, inspirée par la nécessité d'une défense contre un ennemi déjà à l'oeuvre".³

De Gaulle did not take decisive action in the period that followed, and the RPF's membership was to drop from more than 1,000,000 to some 350,000 in the single year, 1949, so Claudel's frustration can hardly have diminished. Nevertheless, although he appears to have played very little part in the Conseil National, his final break with the RPF did not come until the end of 1951, by which time its fortunes had revived to the extent that it was the largest single party in the Chamber, with 118 of the 627 seats. The immediate cause of the break was his anger at the position adopted by the RPF parliamentary group in the vote on ratification of the Schuman Plan on 13 December.

1. Letter to Noël, 2 Sept. 1948, Dossier Noël.

2. id.

3. id.

On the 19th, he sent an emotional and profoundly disillusioned letter to de Gaulle. From it we can pick out three central elements. Firstly, Claudel had long believed in European integration, but he now saw its establishment as a matter of the utmost urgency because of the possibility of war with the Soviet Union. He therefore believed that any measures intended to strengthen Western Europe should be supported, and he was consequently angered by de Gaulle's and the RPF's opposition. Secondly, his reaction was aggravated by the fact that the RPF should have voted against the motion alongside the Communists, whom he saw as being in the service of the very power which made these measures so urgent in the first place. Thirdly, he accused the RPF of regularly voting with the Communists, "de sorte que l'on pourrait parler d'un véritable amalgame", for reasons of parliamentary strategy and "basse politique".¹ The last point is particularly important here. Claudel saw the RPF becoming a parliamentary party like the others, manoeuvring for position and playing the game of the Republic to which it was ostensibly opposed.

Predictably, de Gaulle's reply took the form of a justification, not an apology. He argued that if the RPF and the Communists now coincided in their enmity towards the Constitution or on other issues, that could not be helped, nor did it alter the fact that the RPF's aims were pure, whereas those of the "séparatistes" were not. As to the Schuman Plan, he condemned it as a bastardised caricature of the real Europe, and announced that he would continue his struggle against "les faux-semblants qui donnent aux naïfs et aux faibles des prétextes

1. Letter to de Gaulle, 19 Dec. 1951, Dossier de Gaulle.

pour leur paresse et détournent notre pays de faire la rude politique du salut public et européen".¹.

Although his scorn appeared indirectly aimed at Claudel, and although he had not given any ground at all, the letter ended with something very close to a plea for Claudel to stand by him. However, Claudel was not satisfied. On 1 March, he formally resigned from the Conseil National, after which he seems to have had no further contact with the Gaullist movement. Thus, his first and last wholehearted commitment to a political group aimed at taking power had ended in disillusionment.

He had seen de Gaulle as the type of leader whose strength would inspire France to rebuild herself. Since his faith was placed in an individual rather than in a political doctrine, everything depended on that individual living up to his expectations. This, de Gaulle had manifestly failed to do: by refusing to take power under the existing constitution or to overthrow the Republic by force, he had condemned his supporters to the negative role of permanent opposition which had been played by so many anti-parliamentary groups in the past. For a variety of reasons Claudel was inspired by a sense of urgency. He wanted action, not catastrophism, and his allegiance was not unbreakable. So, although he remained at least nominally loyal for longer than many of de Gaulle's supporters, it could be argued that, rather than in the areas of disagreement on

1. De Gaulle, letter to Claudel, 30 Dec. 1951, Espoir, art. cit., p.35. Compare his words in this letter with almost identical arguments used in his press conference at the Palais d'Orsay on 21 December: see Discours, II, pp.484 - 485.

policy or tactics which subsequently emerged, the real root of Claudel's ultimate disaffection lay in the General's failure to act after the municipal elections of 1947.¹

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1. Léon Noël has claimed that Claudel's break with the General represented a sudden and totally unexpected change of viewpoint (L. Noël, Comprendre de Gaulle, Paris, Plon, 1972, p.284). Noël's claim is surprising in view of the tone of Claudel's letter to him on 2 Sept.1948 (quoted above, this chapter, p.342; and see below, pp.371-372, for other adverse comments in the same letter). On the other hand, it appears that between 1948 and 1951, Claudel had written to the RPF leadership from time to time reaffirming his loyalty (Noël, op. cit., pp.160, 284). However, it is interesting to note that the only letter from Claudel quoted by Noël contains excuses for non-attendance at a meeting, and only praises de Gaulle's efforts during the war, rather than his subsequent achievements or likely success in the future: "Je suis très honoré de l'importance que le général de Gaulle apporte (sic) à ma collaboration et je regrette que mon séjour à la campagne aussi bien que mon âge avancé et mon ignorance de la politique me privent du plaisir d'assister aux réunions auxquelles vous voulez bien me convier. Je ne saurais oublier le rôle providentiel que le général de Gaulle a joué pendant les sombres années de l'occupation. Lui seul fut notre confort et notre espérance. Pendant toute cette période si difficile, où l'on avait le devoir de faire crédit à un parti qui depuis s'est révélé sous son véritable jour, le général n'a commis ni faute ni erreur." (Claudel, letter to Léon Noël, 12 June 1950, quoted in *ibid.*, pp.160-161).

CHAPTER VIII. Grand DesignsA. Claudél's Hopes in May 1945

In our discussion of the Occupation period we saw that Claudél had lived in hopes that a new, more united world would at last begin to emerge when the fighting was over. Although he had not had the temerity to give a time-scale for this development, his exegesis of Revelations had shown him making a vast leap of the mystical imagination to dream once more of the day when all mankind, all nations, would be joined in a spirit of charity and justice, finally aware of their need for each other. It was a grandiose conception of future history, a counterblast to the humiliations of the time. It was also to have important repercussions on his political views after the war.

Within Claudél's overall conception of unity there were two central preoccupations - one relating to the fate of the Jews, and the other relating to Europe. It is the latter which will primarily concern us in this chapter, since the former may be summarised briefly, for it has already been the subject of detailed treatment by other commentators of Claudél's work. Suffice it to observe here that during the war Claudél had not only been revolted by the persecution of Jews in France,¹ but had also been tempted to see the immense sufferings of their race throughout that period as a collective martyrdom possibly tantamount to some form of absolution preparing the way for their conversion to Christianity.²

1. See above, p. 299.

2. See Paul Claudél interroge l'Apocalypse, OC XXV, pp. 402-406: also Jo. II, pp. 493, (18 Aug. 1944), 528, (Sept. 1945), for later speculations on the same lines.

Thus, he was later to see the politico-military-religious struggle in Palestine after the war as having immediate Providential significance. On several occasions during and after the Palestinian conflict of 1947 - 1949 he publicly declared his sympathy for the Jewish cause, and privately he even came to hold the view that the Israeli State should one day include the whole of the Holy Land.¹ By 1949 he had abandoned any serious hope of an imminent conversion of the Jews, but continued to stress what he regarded as the Providential importance of their return from exile, insisting that they, as God's chosen race, had an oecumenical mission to the world in its march towards unity. This, they should fulfil, firstly by rebuilding the Holy Sepulchre so that Israel could become a spiritual meeting-place for pilgrims; and secondly - a bizarre proposal which caused unintentional offence in some Jewish circles because it seemed to smack of residual antisemitism - by making their country the

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1. See "Un message de Paul Claudel", La Riposte, 31 March 1947, "La Réponse de Paul Claudel", *ibid.*, 29 Nov. 1949, (La Riposte was the broadsheet of the Ligue française pour la Palestine libre, of which Claudel was an early member: the Ligue drew support from Catholics and non-Catholics of the most diverse political persuasions); see also Jacques Nantet, "Les Chrétiens et les Juifs au Moyen-Orient" (containing a pro-Israeli statement authorised by Claudel), L'Amitié judéo-chrétienne, Dec. 1949, p. 14; and André Chouraqui, "La méditation de Paul Claudel sur le mystère d'Israël" (summary of several interviews with Claudel), Le Monde, 3 April 1952. Claudel's views are mentioned within the wider context of French opinion in David Lazar, L'Opinion française et la naissance de l'État d'Israël, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1972, pp. 128, 184, 191 - 192. André Chouraqui in "La Voix de Claudel sur Israël", CPC VII, p. 188, reports that Claudel had told him in 1951 of his desire for Israel to cover the entire Holy Land.

financial crossroads of the world, true to their historic role in this vital area of human activity.¹

Turning now to the question of Europe, we might again look back for a moment to the war years. As we observed, Claudel left little evidence of how he envisaged the European idea in political and economic terms: his diary merely indicates that he had continued to reflect on the subject, and that he envisaged some form of organisation, centring on the Elbe-Danube axis, to be established in such a way that the German element would be "balancé par les autres races".² However, while we have little knowledge of the specifically political aspects of his thinking, or of whether it had altered in any way since he wrote "Le Trait d'union" in April 1940, he did leave a striking testimony to his enthusiasm for the mystical conception of Europe as a unified body. In September 1943, anticipating Hitler's imminent defeat, he had written a long poem, "A pied d'oeuvre", appealing for Europeans to take stock of their common heritage for the future. Since this work reaffirms many important themes from earlier years - the notion of complementary differences, the need for awareness of mutual need, and the redundancy of national barriers - it is worth quoting at some length:

1. These views were first published in Une voix sur Israël, Paris, Gallimard, 1950: this figures as a chapter in L'Évangile d'Isaïe, OC XXIV, pp.341-381. Some initial Jewish reactions to this work, as well as his defence of his emphasis on their financial role are reprinted in CPC VII, pp. 340-356, and see also Chouraqui, "La Voix de Claudel sur Israël", *ibid.*, pp. 175-195. For discussion of Claudel's exegeses see, for example, Claude Vigée, "Paul Claudel face à Israël dans la Bible et dans l'histoire", CPC VII, pp. 217-241; Marcel-Jacques Dubois, "La Vocation poétique et la vocation d'Israël", *ibid.*, pp. 243-320. Criticism of the Jewish contributors to CPC VII, for over-favourable treatment of Claudel's ideas is made by Rabi in "Claudelâtres israéliens", L'Arche, no. 140, 26 Oct. - 25 Nov. 1968, pp. 61-62. Some interesting comments on the survival or transformation of antisemitic themes in Claudel's post-war works can be found in Jacques Petit, "Claudel et Bloy", CPC VII, pp. 378-386, and in Petit's, Bernanos, Bloy, Claudel, Péguy, *passim*.

2. Jo. II, p. 386, (17 Jan. 1942), and see above Chapter VI p.277.

Le fou est par terre une fois de plus, et nom de Dieu! ça n'a pas été sans peine! / Qu'allons-nous faire maintenant de ce 'vide au milieu de nous, de ce trou et de cette plaine? / C'est un bien pauvre royaume, a dit ce sage roi jadis, qui se contente d'une seule tribu. / Mais pour celui que nous allons fonder à présent, unanime, il n'y aura jamais assez de langues et d'attributs! / Et puisque c'est ce que je n'ai pas dont je manque, et dont je manque précisément que j'ai besoin, / Ce n'est pas ça, dont je pourrais me passer, qui de moi est le plus différent et le plus loin. / (....).

Peuples qui balancez le pied autour de cette lacune en suspens, je vous invite à regarder ces murs que le fou a jetés par terre, / Convaincu qu'on ne les relèvera pas de celle-là, et ni non pas de celle-là et de quelque autre manière. / Pour me réaliser dans ma forme je n'ai pas besoin de barrières! / Je n'ai pas besoin de murs pour être moi chez moi dans ma personnalité indiscutable. / (Et d'abord il n'y a plus de murs, l'avion les a faits inutilisables.) / (....) / Messieurs, l'Europe! Je vous invite à prendre conscience de cette énorme chose déblayée! / Ce continent à notre disposition tout prêt et cela d'un seul tenant et d'un bout à l'autre devant nous qu'on a nettoyé. / (....) / Peuples! on vous met sous le nez un paradis qui n'est pas précisément celui des sots! / Le Bon Dieu n'a pas fait d'un seul coup cette grande chose pour qu'elle reste éternellement en morceaux.

Claudé was to emerge from the humiliating experience of those years with renewed hopes that this conception would now be translated into reality. His first post-war article relating to international affairs was written on 23 May 1945, though it was not published until four weeks later, in Le Monde illustré. At the time when he was writing, the Charter of the United Nations was being drawn up at the San Francisco Conference, the unconditional surrender of Germany was only a fortnight past, and the Grand Alliance was still superficially intact, despite increasing areas of disagreement. In the optimism of the moment, the future appeared inviting to Claudé, and could be fitted into the perspective of his exegetical prophecies. Thus, in his opening paragraph, he stated categorically that the war had marked "une étape décisive" in the Providential movement of mankind towards unity.²

1. Po., pp. 585-586.

2. "Après la victoire", CPC IV, p.290.

Couched in Claudel's unique blend of mystical historicism, symbolic geography, and straightforward political observation, the rest of the long article was intended to elaborate on, and draw conclusions from this initial premise. He argued that the First World War had been a largely European phenomenon which had scarcely touched many areas of the world, or had drawn them only temporarily into the arena. With the return of peace Europe had been left to reconstruct herself alone, while the other major actors, including Russia, had withdrawn from close contact. Echoing the views which he had expressed during the 1930s, he maintained that, for Europe, the Treaty of Versailles, when compared with the results of the Revolutionary Wars and the Congress of Vienna, could be seen as a retrograde step. It had merely catered to the divisive force of nationalism in one form or another and had turned Europe into an incoherent patchwork, rather than constituting it "dans l'unité organique que la nature lui proposait."¹

Equally, he still claimed that the German desire for a Mitteleuropa was in itself "une idée saine, une idée organique", responding to the logic of geography and distribution of natural resources.² Had it been accomplished slowly and peacefully like the Zollverein in the past, Claudel believed it would have been accepted by the other Great Powers. As it was, of course, Hitler had attempted to accomplish his aims by violence, so that Britain and France had been forced to intervene.

1. id.

2. *ibid.*, p.291.

However, Claudel was far less concerned to dwell on Germany's crimes than to show that good must nevertheless come as a result. And it is worth noting in this context that the article contained no word of punishment or call for revenge. What he wished to show was that the chaos arising from Germany's quest for hegemony in Europe had, as it were, created a vacuum at the centre, which had drawn in the other nations of the world. The salvation of Europe had thus been achieved by forces outside of herself and her future would now lie in the control of two enormous "blocs de forces" - the Anglo-American and its colonial or other dependencies on one side, and the Russian on the other.¹ He was by no means unaware of the present and potential rivalry between these two blocs, but he hoped that this would only be temporary - "une phase du progrès qu'accomplit notre univers dans la conscience de sa solidarité totale".² Eventually, he maintained, instead of being pulled apart at the centre by a bipolar force of division, Europe would assume her natural role as the unifying central link between the two poles; or, as he put it in Biblical imagery: "Entre les deux Bêtes apocalyptiques, celle de la Mer et celle de la Terre, c'est la Vallée qui aura fait non pas la division mais la soudure. Ainsi soit-il!"³

Particularly revealing of his will to unity at that time, was the fact that he had apparently forgotten his violent anti-communism and anti-Sovietism of earlier years. He was quite prepared to accept that Eastern Europe would remain under Russian influence - though he

1. ibid., p.292.

2. ibid., p.293.

3. ibid., p.294.

did not foresee total domination - on the supposition that the Soviet Union had now come of age as a Great Power and would adapt herself accordingly. Looking forward to a rich exchange of products, aid and ideas between West and East through the intermediary of Europe, he asserted enthusiastically that Russia's present entry into the civilised world was one of the major events of all time:

Le plus grand résultat peut-être de cette guerre, c'est que l'isolement de la Russie a cédé. A-t-on suffisamment remarqué à quel point la claustration de cet Empire, de ce complexe formidable qui recèle entre ses frontières la plus grande partie des capacités spatiales et peut-être des possibilités économiques de la planète était un phénomène paradoxal et de prolongation inconcevable? Jusqu'ici, la politique ne lui avait pas permis de jouer dans l'histoire du monde un rôle somme toute proportionné à son importance. Le traité de Versailles ne porte pas sa signature et ne tient aucun compte de son existence. L'agrégation de la Russie au reste du monde civilisé est un événement aussi important qu'aux siècles précédents la découverte de l'Amérique et des nations ermites de l'Asie.

Inevitably, the euphoria and the apparent ideological tolerance of May 1945 were to be dissipated by the frightening tensions of the divided world which emerged during the years that followed. This did not, of course, lead Claudel to abandon his faith in the eventual unification of all mankind. On the contrary, within the mystical perspective the crises of the moment could be viewed as "les douleurs de l'enfantement", to which even Stalin's designs were ultimately making a contribution, as had Hitler's before him.² Nor did Claudel cease to believe that sooner or later Europe, united in its entirety, would have a crucial part to play.³ But in political

1. *ibid.*, p. 293.

2. *MI*, p.337. See also "Le Rassemblement de la terre", *Revue de Paris*, July 1947, pp.3-17; *L'Évangile d'Isaïe*, OC XXIV, pp.367-381.

3. See "L'Europe", (manuscript dated "Noël 1947"), *Pr.*, p.1381.

terms the expression of Claudel's internationalism was necessarily restricted to support for more modest projects offered by the circumstances of the period. Before discussing his ideas in this field, however, let us first consider the development of his attitude towards the two Superpowers whose rivalry was to condition the fate of Europe.

B. Russia, America and the Cold War

In the light of Claudel's violently anti-Soviet views before 1940 it comes as no surprise that his period of warmth towards Russia after the war was extremely brief. His conciliatory mood was replaced by a swing back to the most unequivocal antagonism, exacerbated, no doubt, by the disappointment of his earlier hopes and by his fear of communist influence in France. Presumably, this change of attitude occurred gradually as international and domestic tensions increased. Whatever the case, it is likely that Claudel was psychologically prepared for the Cold War some months before it was given a quasi-official status by the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947. Such, at least, is the impression conveyed by his diary for November 1946, where he noted, underneath a newspaper photograph of Stalin and his lieutenants: "Quelle collection de brutes. Tout le monde en uniforme! des Surboches. Caboches de Surboches - Béhémoth."¹

Over the following years the need to bar the road to communism - in France, in Western Europe as a whole, and, later, in

1. Jo. II, p.1109 (note 3 to p.574).

South-East Asia - was to be a recurrent theme in his articles, his speeches, and even in a radio broadcast celebrating the approach of Holy Year. Returning to much the same type of apocalyptic rhetoric as he had used before the war, he repeatedly denounced international communism as a wholly evil force dedicated to the systematic destruction of every human right, basic freedom or Christian value. As usual, there was no question of rationally discussing the international situation in terms of the power struggle between two rival politico-economic blocs, or of trying to refute the ideology cloaking Soviet expansionism. It had to be part of the eternal struggle between Light and Darkness. For instance, in the course of a speech in October 1947 he would declare:

Pour la première fois la moitié du monde se trouve rallié contre la liberté sous le drapeau de l'esclavage. C'est l'oeuvre de vingt siècles de civilisation humaine et chrétienne, ce sont tous les principes sacrés qui rendent la vie digne d'être vécue qui sont mis en cause.¹

Or, we might take another example from an article written in April 1949 after the trial of Cardinal Mindszenty in Hungary. In this case we find a characteristic mixture of Biblical and historical references, coupled with emphasis on the criminal complicity of left-wing intellectuals in France:

1. "Appel de la Ligue franco-américaine", France-USA, 1 Oct. 1947. See also, letters to Agnes Meyer, 19 June and 22 Dec. 1947, Dossier Meyer.

Après quinze siècles de christianisme l'Humanité voit avec stupeur et horreur, sur la moitié de l'Europe et la sixième partie du globe terrestre, l'esclavage rétabli dans des conditions de cruauté et d'ignominie qui confondent l'imagination. Elle assiste à la restauration triomphale, non seulement excusée mais acclamée par une portion non médiocre de nos savants et de nos intellectuels, du régime de Nabuchad²nosor et de Néron. Un régime qui actuellement menace de s'étendre à l'univers entier et dont nous ne sommes garantis que par des assurances précaires.¹

In short, Claudel had reverted to his siege mentality.

Once again he was in a position of militant defence, wielding crude but potent religio-political mots d'ordre against a threat which was automatically identified with absolute Evil. But it should not be forgotten that this view of communism had long been held by the Vatican itself,² nor that he was writing in the poisonous atmosphere of the Cold War, when it seemed at times that peace literally hung on a thread. Indeed, by late 1947, almost every non-communist political grouping in France, from the RPF to the Socialists, was loudly beating the anti-communist drum. Moreover, although Claudel was aggressive in his rhetoric, he cannot be described as extreme. If we take into account that there were some who demanded that the French Communist Party should be outlawed and Thorez charged with treason, or others who advocated a preventive war against Russia, Claudel's outbursts were almost mild by comparison.³ It is true that in July 1951

1. "Quelqu'un barre la route", Le Figaro littéraire, 29 April 1949: see also "Au seuil de l'Année sainte", manuscript dated 28 Nov. 1949, ASPC, File XVC "Divers", probably broadcast on French radio in December (see Jo. II, p.711, 9 Dec. 1949). Other references to Claudel's anti-communist and anti-Soviet statements will be found throughout this chapter.
2. See, for example, A. Rhodes, *op. cit.*, p.255, ff.
3. For accounts of the popular mood in France, see, for example, A. Werth, *op. cit.*, p.255 ff. and *passim* thereafter; or Dominique Desanti, L'Année où le monde a tremblé: 1947, Paris, Albin Michel, *passim*.

his name was linked by the press with a document produced by a predominantly right-wing pressure group, the Comité international pour l'étude des questions européennes, calling for a pre-emptive nuclear strike in Korea. But the fact is that by then he no longer belonged to the Comité, and in any case he did not believe the atom bomb should be used pre-emptively.¹

What of his attitude towards the other Superpower? There was to be no hint of neutralism in Claudel's outlook: he remained as firmly Atlanticist as he had been before the war. Whether or not he had ever placed any faith in the between-East-and-West policy pursued successively by de Gaulle and Bidault, he shed no tears for its progressive abandonment in the course of 1947. His diary records that in April of that year he had, in fact, spoken to de Gaulle, stressing "l'importance de prendre nettement parti contre le communisme, contre la Russie et pour l'Amérique - le bloc occidental".²

1. For a brief discussion of this controversy, and quotations from letters exchanged by Claudel and Massignon on the subject in July 1950, see Michel Malicet's introduction to Corres. PC - LM, pp.36-38. The original document had been published in Le Monde over the three days, 11-13 July. The chairman of the Comité subsequently admitted that Claudel had had no knowledge of the document (Le Monde, 16 July). Among other members of the group, most of whom denied approving the document, were leading French politicians such as Paul Reynaud, Maurice Schumann, Paul Bastid, Édouard Bonnefous; and, on the English side, Lords Brabazon and Vansittart, or Air Vice-Marshal Bennett. In the present chapter I have not included discussion of the previous activities of the Comité, since I have not yet been able to ascertain precisely when Claudel joined or left the group, nor the part he may have played in it.

2. Jo. II, p.592, (30 April 1947).

Moreover, his enthusiasm for the American connection was obviously known in official circles. On 13 June, eight days after Marshall's Harvard speech, he learned that Bidault wanted to have him appointed president of the Société France-USA, a government-backed friendship organisation. After visiting Bidault and discussing the question with Caffery, the American ambassador, Claudel duly accepted.¹

Two articles by Claudel, and two speeches he made to the Society, were to be printed in its monthly broadsheet between October 1947 and March 1949.² Naturally enough, they concentrated on the struggle against world communism, the benefits of Marshall Aid, and the need for Western solidarity. It is possible that he himself might even have favoured going beyond mere alliance to some form of closer union with the United States. During the Occupation he had spent many hours discussing the matter with Emmanuel Monick, who - in

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1. *ibid.*, p.597, (13-15 June 1947). At the meeting with Caffery, Claudel put forward his own ideas for "coopération économique et coloniale". See also letter to Agnes Meyer, 19 June 1947, ASPC, Dossier Agnes Meyer, where he refers to the idea of using American capital to develop the French empire. Claudel's correspondence with Agnes Meyer has been discussed by Eugène Roberto in "Une amitié washingtonienne, Madame Agnes Meyer et Paul Claudel (1927-1955)", CCC II, pp.137-198.
 2. "Appel de la Ligue franco-américaine", France-USA, Oct. 1947; "Le Discours inaugural de S.E. l'ambassadeur Paul Claudel", *ibid.*, March 1948; "Discours au général Marshall", *ibid.*, Dec. 1948; "Le Regard américain vers la France", France - Etats-Unis, March 1949. See also rough draft of uncompleted article, "La Victoire du ciel étoilé", 5 Jan. 1948, ASPC, File PXVB"Divers", couched in his usual mystico-political style on the symbolism of the American flag and starry sky representing hope, freedom and the union of nations. Russia is symbolised by Sisera, evil enemy of the children of Israel in Judges 4 & 5.

collaboration with Michel Debré - had devised a detailed scheme for an Atlantic Community, endowed with a very substantial measure of supranational sovereignty. And although Claudel's diary suggests that, at the time, he had been more interested in the possibilities of European organisation, M. Monick recalls that he had appeared extremely interested by the Atlantic idea.¹

There was at least an echo of this in Claudel's speech to the Society on 14 February 1948. Referring with enthusiasm to Monick's view that the oceans should now be seen as highways rather than barriers, he emphasised that the American link with Europe had passed from being "accidentel" to "essentiel" and "permanent". Having also spoken of the West as forming "un bloc homogène" or even "un nouveau consortium", he had concluded with the words:

C'est maintenant aux particuliers, aux citoyens de cette nouvelle Fédération démocratique et chrétienne en qui résident tous les espoirs de la civilisation qu'il appartient de s'en servir. L'Association France-USA est là pour leur montrer le chemin.²

Obviously the word "fédération" was to be taken figuratively here. Claudel was, after all, speaking in his capacity as president of the Society and it was not his place to advocate far-reaching, potentially controversial political measures. Nevertheless, it is interesting that he should have alluded, however obliquely, to

1. See Jo. II, p.386, (17 Jan. 1942), for reference to a conversation with Monick on this question. In an interview given to me in April 1973 M. Monick emphasised Claudel's interest in the Atlantic scheme, later published pseudonymously as Jacquier-Bruère, Demain la paix, Paris, Plon, 1945.
2. "Le Discours inaugural de S.E. l'ambassadeur Paul Claudel," loc. cit.

Monick's ideas, and it may not be without significance that in August 1949, some three weeks after the National Assembly's ratification of the Atlantic Pact, he should have noted in his diary: "Ce ~~qui~~ pourrait arriver de mieux à la France actuelle serait que l'Amérique la prenne en curatelle".¹ It was merely a passing comment so we should not make too much of it, but whatever he may have had in mind, the strength of his general Atlanticist orientation is not in doubt.

Nevertheless, his faith in American protection was to take a severe jolt before he died - the cause of his distress being Eisenhower's refusal to intervene decisively in Indo-China at the time of Dien Bien Phu. In a historico-religious perspective Claudel was inclined to view the world-wide process of decolonisation as a consequence of Europe's desertion of her christianising mission,² but in practice he was far from resigned to the loss of Indo-China. On the contrary, in July 1948, during the controversy over the Along Bay Declaration offering a form of independence to Vietnam, he had published an extraordinarily jingoistic panegyric to the French paratroopers serving there.

At that stage there was no hint that Claudel, any more than most of his compatriots, saw it as an ideological issue. Beneath the blood-and-soil imagery of his poem, the familiar invocation of a warrior saint, and allusions to the worth of France's missionaries

1. Jo. II, p.699, (Aug. 1949).

2. See *ibid.*, pp.607, (15 Aug. 1947); 769 (April 1951).

the message was clear: "Cette terre où nous prenons pied, c'est la nôtre que nous avons payée cher"¹. But by 1954 the conflict had been internationalised within the broader context of the Chinese Revolution and the Korean War. So his colonialist sentiments were to be reinforced by a no doubt genuine belief that Indo-China was one of the vital battlefields in the crusade against world communism.²

Thus, Claudel was among the interventionnistes who fully supported Bidault's desperate attempts to obtain massive American intervention so that even if France could not gain outright victory she could at least negotiate from strength at Geneva.³ On the day when Dien Bien Phu collapsed Claudel wrote a venomous article - rejected by Le Figaro as inopportune - deriding the Americans for their weakness, condemning their Korean armistice, and announcing that if France were defeated in Indo-China there would be nothing to prevent the spread of communism throughout South-East Asia. "C'est une histoire comme celle de Roland à Roncevaux", he proclaimed, seemingly oblivious to the fact that if Eisenhower had complied with Bidault's request, there might well have been another world war.⁴

1. "Saint Michel Archange", (written 16 July 1948), Po., p.894.

2. See Jo. II, p.723, (March 1950), where he notes: "Les circonstances ont fait que la France est la pièce centrale de résistance contre la Bête soviétique, soit en France soit en Asie".

3. See Jo. II, p.861, (3 May 1954): "Troisième attaque de Dien Bien Phu de plus en plus resserré et rétréci. Rodomontades et lâcheté de l'Amérique. Cet Eisenhower est décidément un pauvre homme".

4. "Un cri d'horreur et d'indignation", manuscript dated 7 May 1954, ASPC, File PXVA "Divers". See Jo. II, p.862, (7-8 May 1954) for reference to Pierre Brisson's refusal of the article. Signs of earlier dissatisfaction with the American cease-fire in Korea can be found in his preface, "SOS pour la Corée", in Raphael Collard, Corée, terre déchirée, published by the author, Cormontreuil, 1952, pp. 7-10. Claudel writes scornfully of the politicians who had originally divided Korea, and who are now preparing to perpetuate the division. He emphasises Korea's right to unity, vituperates against Stalin, and evidently wishes to see the war continue.

Given the atmosphere of national hysteria which reigned in France at that moment, Claudel's anger was understandable; all the more so, because he had placed such faith in America as the cornerstone of Western solidarity, and had himself worked to strengthen the bonds linking France to the United States. Moreover, the shock had a profound effect on his thinking. Three months after the fall of Dien Bien Phu, he wrote to Agnes Meyer that he had been reflecting deeply on the course of events and had been forced to an agonising reconsideration of his position.¹ Although he said he did not reproach the Americans for their desperate desire not to become involved in another war, he argued that he, and his country as a whole, had lost confidence in the United States. It was obvious that the Americans would only fight if there was "une overwhelming chance de gagner", and he believed that their previous retreats would be repeated in the future, not only in the Far East, but also, probably, if it came to the crunch in Europe.²

More surprisingly, however, the same letter and some remarks in his diary at that time show that the reflections set in train by the fall of Dien Bien Phu had jolted him out of his previous mood of cold-war militarism. He told Agnes Meyer that his painful reappraisal of the situation had made him realise the futility of attempting to stop the spread of communism by force. Efforts in this direction over the previous ten years had proved a tragic failure. Thus, despite his "épouvantable répugnance", he had been forced to wonder whether it might not be the

1. See letter to Agnes Meyer, 3 Aug. 1954, Dossier Meyer.

2. id.

will of Providence that these attempts should not succeed.¹ It was said in the Bible that evil could not be defeated by evil means. There was surely a lesson in the fact that the West had been, and would continue to be defeated when it sought to crush communism by violence. The means to triumph must instead be to work by peaceful persuasion and above all by setting an example of social justice in the West:

Il n'est pas chrétien d'employer jamais la violence et la force, autrement qu'à titre absolument exceptionnel et indispensable. Or, ce n'est pas ce qui s'est produit dans notre attitude à l'égard du monde communiste. Non seulement nous n'avons pas réussi, mais encore il est à prévoir que nous serons encore battus et rebattus.

Dès lors ne ferions-nous pas mieux de causer et au lieu de vaincre, de convaincre.

La vérité vous délivrera. C'est la vérité seule qui délivrera ces millions d'obscurcis.

Le monde communiste repose sur le mensonge et la tyrannie. On ne vient pas radicalement à bout de la violence et de la tyrannie par la force, mais par la contagion du vrai et du bien. Ce sont ces occasions de contagion qu'il faut multiplier et d'abord supprimer chez nous l'injustice.²

We possess no evidence to show whether this return to a mixture of practical realism and generous Christian idealism continued to dominate Claudel's views on the question throughout the remaining few months of his life. Given the volatility of his temperament he could easily have reverted to his former bellicose frame of mind. Nevertheless, his words in August 1954 serve as an appropriate reminder that Claudel was never as unbendingly fanatical as his vocabulary might often seem to imply.

1. id. See also Jo. II, p.871, (3 Aug. 1954): and ibid., pp.869, (4 July 1954), 871, (21 July 1954) for earlier sad comments on the course of events.

2. Letter to Agnes Meyer, 3 Aug. 1954, Dossier Meyer.

C. Germany and Europe

Despite the many anxieties and disappointments of the post-war years, a small but vital part of Claudel's dream of unity was to be fulfilled within his lifetime, as a result of his country's reluctant change of policy towards Germany under the force of circumstances beyond its control. We pick up the thread of his ideas on this question in the second half of 1947, at a time when France was abandoning the last shreds of her between-East-and-West policy, but was still pledged to the line inaugurated by de Gaulle with regard to Germany. In other words, on the latter issue, France proposed the long-term solution of a loose confederation of autonomous states, while in the meantime opposing Anglo-American pressure for unification of the three Western occupation zones, since the British and the Americans wanted the establishment of an authority with a meaningful central administration: the intention of French policy was thus to keep Germany divided and weak.¹ As to the question of European unity, although most political groups to the right of the Communists paid lip service to the idea in some form or another, there was as yet relatively little concerted pressure for its establishment in the immediate, and there were, in any case, fundamental differences in the type of organisation envisaged by the various factions.²

1. For discussion of French policy towards Germany see, for example, Alfred Grosser, La IV^e République et sa politique extérieure, Paris, Armand Colin, 3rd ed., 1972, pp.193-214.

2. See *ibid.*, pp.111-141, for the positions of the parties and their internal divisions on the question.

In general terms, Claudel's own views on these two issues were to be broadly in accord with the ideas which he had aired immediately before the war. He evidently continued to believe that on political and moral grounds the long-term solution to the German problem should not lie in the direction of repressive territorial guarantees or indefinite occupation, but, ideally, in rebuilding a new Germany under solid political institutions which would nevertheless prevent the re-emergence of a totalitarian Reich. He also believed in the need for European organisation both because it remained an attractive ideal in itself and because it offered a means of containing and channelling Germany's strength within a wider complex of nations. Moreover, his desire for a speedy resolution of the German question and for the unification of the western half of Europe was reinforced by his preoccupation with the Soviet threat. These were the ideas in his mind when he wrote to Agnes Meyer on 19 June 1947:

Je suis aussi, à la différence de mes compatriotes, partisan d'une Allemagne forte. D'abord on n'a pas le droit de tuer une nation. Puis l'Allemagne est notre bouclier. Il faut qu'un bouclier soit solide. Enfin, c'est la pièce centrale des futurs États-Unis d'Europe. Croyez-moi, Staline aura le sort de Hitler.¹

Leaving aside the broader question of European unity for a moment, how did Claudel envisage the future political organisation of Germany? The evidence available on the subject is confusing because of Claudel's tendency to write in vague, impressionistic terms or use registers of

1. In Dossier Meyer.

vocabulary which veiled his meaning. Before the war, it should be remembered, he had referred glowingly to the federalist tradition which had existed in Germany before the advent of the Prussian-dominated, unitarian Reich. He had argued that Germany should be eventually reconstituted as "un État fédératif", where the citizens would have a right to exercise political responsibility "à portée de leurs mains", so that there would be a balance between "le devoir de s'occuper de ses propres affaires et le légitime intérêt de l'actionnaire d'une grande firme".¹ All of this sounded very attractive, but Claudel had given no clear indication of whether he was thinking in terms of a close federation with an effective central authority, or a loose fédération d'États of the type which was to be advocated by de Gaulle and others after the war as a means of permanently curbing Germany's strength and potential for aggression.

It is equally difficult to judge what Claudel had in mind during the second half of 1947 or in 1948. When writing to Agnes Meyer in June 1947 he had called for a strong Germany, but how strong did he really want Germany to be? It is unfortunate that we do not know precisely what transpired during his meeting with de Gaulle four months later, after he returned to Paris from Brangues. In his diary for 31 October he had listed among the topics which he wished to discuss with the General: "Politique extérieure: L'All[emagne]. La France eu égard à sa situation géographique réclame une position de priorité. Personne ne comprend l'All[emagne] et n'en est compris comme la Fr[ance] - La Confédération du Rhin".²

These words could be taken to suggest that, with his admiration for de Gaulle then at its height, and believing as he did that the

1. "Le Trait d'union", CPC IV, p.285.

2. Jo.II, p.615, (31 Oct. 1947).

General was soon to take command of the "barrière internationale",¹ Claudel would have wished to see Germany as a loose puppet confederation under benign French "protection" like the former Confederation of the Rhine established by Napoleon in 1806. If this was the case, it matches oddly with Claudel's earlier advocacy of "une Allemagne forte". Indeed, it would have corresponded fairly closely to the type of solution which the General himself favoured as a means of keeping Germany weak.² Furthermore, notwithstanding Claudel's avowed contempt for all forms of nationalism (which he had publicly reaffirmed in an article some months previously)³ the note in his diary might imply that he was by no means impervious to the nationalistic conception of grandeur embodied by de Gaulle.

Be that as it may, although Claudel's views on the German question were to remain unclear, it is at least evident that they diverged very substantially from de Gaulle's in the course of the following year, because he was increasingly concerned by the urgency of rebuilding Germany whereas the General was not. In December 1947, writing again to Agnes Meyer, Claudel once more stressed the need for a solid European front against the Soviet threat. "De ce barrage" he wrote, "la France forcément doit être la pièce centrale et principale, mais je suis également convaincu qu'il faut procéder à une restauration de l'Allemagne".⁴ And he had even

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1. Letter to de Gaulle, undated, but probably 6 or 7 Oct. 1947, Dossier de Gaulle, (see above p.336, note 2).
 2. See, for example, de Gaulle, Discours et messages, II, pp.148-151, (part of press conference, 12 Nov. 1947). Guy de Carmoy, in Les Politiques étrangères de la France, 1944-1966, Paris, La Table Ronde, 1967, p.87, observes that de Gaulle's solutions to German problem were similar to those which had formerly been expounded by Jacques Bainville and Charles Maurras. See also, Roger Massip, De Gaulle et l'Europe, Paris, Flammarion, 1963, pp.43-58, for concise discussion of evolution of de Gaulle's views on Germany from 1944 onwards.
 3. See "Le Messianisme nationaliste", (Le Figaro littéraire, 2 April 1947), Pr., pp.1372-1375.
 4. Letter to Agnes Meyer, 22 Dec. 1947, Dossier Meyer.

added later: "Il faut rendre à ce pays les limites auxquelles il a droit et, à mon avis, le réunir à l'Autriche".¹

The idea of a German union with Austria may have merely been a passing thought, but he returned forcefully to the need for an immediate solution to the German problem itself when he wrote an article entitled "Quelques réflexions sur l'Allemagne" on 8 March 1948 in the aftermath of the Prague coup. This piece made no explicit mention of any French right to a position of special influence over Germany, but it did offer a pressing call for reconciliation between the two countries. Mystical arguments were put forward to show the Providential significance of Germany's geographic position, and her destiny to serve as the hub of Europe.² But there was also the hard-headed political view that western Europe and, more specifically France, its "pièce centrale", needed a strong Germany as a buffer against "l'effroyable danger soviétique".³

If Germany was to recover, he maintained, she must be allowed the material and psychological conditions to rebuild herself. He argued that some precautions must still be taken for the time-being (though he did not commit himself to specifics), but Germany must be allowed to regain her self-respect by earning her living freely. In the tone of an enlightened parent discussing an errant child, he pointed out that Germany was physically and morally curable, so she must be given the chance to learn the responsible use of political freedom:

1. id.

2. See Pr., p.1383 (the article was eventually published in A présent, 19 March 1948).

3. ibid., p.1382.

Une liberté aussi rapprochée que possible de son exercice. Non point celle d'un atome social à qui l'on permet de déposer de temps en temps un bout de papier dans un trou, mais celle d'un citoyen, conscient d'une activité et d'une responsabilité effectives à la mesure de ses deux bras .¹

Echoing the articles that he had written before the war, he suggested that this purpose was best served by "la forme fédérale" which was far more supple and practical than the rigid, unitary form which had dominated in the nineteenth century.² He then continued: "C'est par les États-Unis d'Allemagne que sont appelés à naître les États-Unis d'Europe. Quel horizon magnifique".³

As always, Claudel had contented himself with giving a general impression, and had left the practical details open. Besides the fact that he had made no mention of how Germany was to be defended militarily, we still cannot be sure, in political terms, of whether he was anticipating a close or a loose federation. Given his emphasis on the need for German strength it would be logical to suppose that it was the former (which would still have been very different from the unitarian Reich), but it will be seen later that this may not have been the case. Equally, on the question of European organisation, there was no hint of how he imagined its political, administrative or economic form.

Nevertheless, in so far as his overriding concern was to see positive action, rather than further delay with regard to Germany and

1. ibid., p.1384.

2. id.

3. id.

the organisation of Western Europe, Claudel's position anticipated changes of French foreign policy which were soon to occur. By the end of the London Conference in June 1948, Bidault had finally bowed to Anglo-American pressure for unification of the three Western occupation zones of Germany, with a view to establishing "une forme fédérale de Gouvernement qui protège d'une manière satisfaisante les droits des différents États tout en prévoyant une Autorité centrale suffisante".¹ The London recommendations were ratified by a narrow majority (after heated debate and subject to several unenforceable provisions) in the National Assembly. Furthermore, the motion passed by the Assembly reflected the growing awareness that, in the absence of permanent military occupation, the organisation of a wider European framework offered possible insurance against the renewal of German aggression. It was, in fact, stated that the Government should apply the London recommendations "en accentuant son action en vue de l'organisation économique et politique de l'Europe".² With control of foreign policy passing to Robert Schuman for the next four years the impetus towards a European framework was to be maintained.

But what of Claudel's political relationship with de Gaulle? By the late summer of 1948 their views on the German question were undoubtedly poles apart. Although the General often preached on the danger posed by Russia, his position had in now way altered towards Germany, his stance at the time of the London Conference being one of total opposition to the change of French policy. At a safe distance

1. Official communiqué, 7 June 1948, quoted in Grosser, op.cit., p.211.

2. Motion passed on 17 June 1948 (by a majority of 8) quoted in Grosser, op.cit., p.213.

from the practicalities of the situation, he had described the London recommendations as "l'abandon final" and demanded that they be rejected out of hand.¹ The contradiction between his viewpoint and Claudel's was to be manifested, albeit at second hand, in September. Léon Noël, the acting chairman of the RPF's Commission des Affaires étrangères, had written to Claudel on 28 August of that year, giving his opinions on the German problem and inviting Claudel's comments. Noël's attitude largely mirrored de Gaulle's, in that the whole emphasis of his argument was on the danger of German dynamism and on the need to prevent the reconstitution of a centralised Reich. This he wanted to achieve by integrating the German Länder into some form of Western union or, eventually, a European organisation.² Claudel's reply (also containing criticisms of de Gaulle which have been mentioned in an earlier chapter)³ did not take up the question of European organisation, but seized antagonistically on the Gaullists' attitude towards Germany.

In a somewhat brutal tone, he declared that Russia was the real threat, which had to be countered by immediate action rather than empty, long-term theories. Having thus implied that the RPF was wasting its time, he went on to make his case for a strong Germany as "le bouclier d'Europe", using much the same political arguments as he had in his earlier article and correspondence. But if the desired

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1. Declaration by de Gaulle, 9 June 1948, Discours et messages, II, p.192.
 2. See Léon Noël, letter to Claudel, 28 Aug. 1948, ASPC, Dossier Léon Noël.
 3. See above p.342.

result was to be achieved, he no longer felt that "une Allemagne fédéralisée" would suffice: firstly, because he thought Germany did not want it, since he believed that in French eyes it was a means of restricting her strength; secondly, because it was in itself, an artificial, outdated and potentially inefficient system, the practical results of which could not easily be foreseen.¹

It is possible, given the context, that when he criticised the federal idea in this letter he was thinking particularly of the Gaullist scheme for a loose fédération d'États. If that was so, it also suggested that when he himself had advocated a federal solution for Germany he had, in fact, been thinking on much the same lines as de Gaulle but there had been a confusion in his mind between his desire for a Germany strong enough to serve as a shield but still weak enough not to pose a threat to France. On the other hand, if the letter really meant that Claudel had now swung against any form of federal solution whatsoever, did this imply that his fear of Russia had finally led him to favour the re-establishment of a highly centralised, unitarian Germany? If that were the case, it might be explained by the international tension resulting from the Russian blockade of Berlin, which had by then entered its third month. Yet, it is also conceivable that the letter simply marked a characteristically Claudelian overreaction to what he saw as the RPF's sterile intransigence. In reality he would probably have supported any practicable solution which seemed to answer the basic criteria of blocking communism and facilitating a satisfactory relationship between France and Germany.

1. All of the views mentioned in this paragraph in letter to Noël, 2 Sept. 1948, Dossier Léon Noël.

However, it was the broader, related question of European integration which contributed so largely to his final break with de Gaulle in 1951. In theory, the General was at that time committed to European unity in the form of a confederation which, while preserving full national sovereignty in other areas, would allow a measure of supranational authority over defence and the economy. Yet he made it a sine qua non that France must first be strong - in other words, a Gaullist State - and that the process of integration could only begin once the overall confederal framework had been created in such a way as to prevent any possibility of German hegemony. In the name of these conditions he denounced the plan for a European Coal and Steel Community as a dangerous antinational caricature which, by sacrificing French sovereignty without the necessary confederal framework and guarantees, would discredit the whole idea of unity.¹ In practice, then, his stance was completely negative.

Claudé's position was very different. On the one hand, he desperately wanted to believe that in the West, at least, his ideal of unity was to be fulfilled. In June 1951 he had, in fact, claimed that now, finally, in a period of terrible danger, "nous nous sommes aperçus, dans l'abandon de tous les chauvinismes absurdes et meurtriers... que Dieu a créé tous les peuples différents non pour se haïr mais pour se fournir l'un à l'autre complément."² Moreover, in concrete political terms, he favoured immediate steps towards integration, and supported the Schuman Plan as a first move in the right direction. After the RPF

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1. See text of de Gaulle's press conference at the Palais d'Orsay on 21 Dec. 1951, Discours et messages, II, pp.480-493.
 2. "Témoignage", (written 23 June 1951 but unpublished during Claudé's lifetime), Pr., p.1391.

had voted against ratification of the Plan in a parliamentary debate on 13 December of that year, Claudel wrote to de Gaulle in a tone of restrained anger:

A tout prix et d'urgence il faut constituer une Europe. Les mesures proposées sont à coup sûr insuffisantes, elles sont en tout cas, le résultat d'une campagne difficile et d'efforts méritoires, un pas dans la bonne direction. Le devoir du parti qui s'honore de votre nom était de les soutenir de son vote.¹

As we observed in the last chapter, de Gaulle's reply did not satisfy Claudel, and the political break between them was, in effect, complete. Nevertheless, the project for the ECSC had been ratified. A step had been taken towards setting Franco-German relations on a rational? collaborative footing. Although we do not know how Claudel viewed the subsequent controversy over the Pleven Plan for a European Defence Community, it is evident that his general wish was to be convinced that a new era had dawned at last. The strength of his enthusiasm for the process of reconciliation with Germany was to be movingly displayed in March 1953, when he came as near as he ever would to the apotheosis of which he had surely dreamed. The setting was Hamburg, the city which he had once left bitterly in 1914, amid the insults of a war-hungry crowd. On the night of 15 March, after the successful performance of his Histoire de Tobie et de Sara at the Schauspielhaus, the audience had called him to the stage, whence he had addressed them with the words:

1. Letter to de Gaulle, 19 Dec. 1951, Dossier de Gaulle.

Je suis un vieillard de quatre-vingt-cinq ans.
 (...). J'ai vu trois guerres et mon coeur s'arrête en
 pensant au danger d'une nouvelle guerre. (...).
 L'arrangement entre les peuples est possible. (...).
 Bien sûr il y a des montagnes, mais les montagnes sont
 faites pour être gravies.¹

He had closed with the appeal: "Plus de guerre fratricide entre
 nos deux peuples!"² Then he had read his "Cantique de l'espérance",
 which was received with a truly massive ovation. In Le Figaro
littéraire it was reported that "dans le public bouleversé, sur
 beaucoup de visages coulaient des larmes."³ Thus, Claudel could
 believe that history was finally starting to vindicate his long-
 cherished hopes. Writing to some German students two months after
 his visit to Hamburg, he again returned to the theme: "Si Dieu a
 fait les hommes différents, n'est-ce pas qu'ils aient les uns aux
 autres quelque chose à se donner?"⁴ Germany and France had done
 battle together so often in the past; now, in the moment of
 reconciliation, Claudel once more declared that the struggle had
 been a form of communion, creating "une fraternité indivisible", and
 from this shared experience had come understanding:

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1. Quoted in unsigned article, "A Hambourg, Claudel harangue
 par surprise son public", Le Figaro littéraire, 21 March 1953
 (most of the text of this article is reprinted in Margret
 Andersen, Claudel et l'Allemagne, CCC III, p.178).
 2. Quoted in Marthe Bibesco, Échanges avec Paul Claudel, nos
lettres inédites, Paris, Mercure de France, 1972, p.40.
 3. "A Hambourg, Claudel harangue...", loc. cit.
 4. "A des étudiants allemands", undated (but reference in Jo. II,
 p.836, 24-25 May 1953), no record of publication, ASPC,
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Est-ce que nous ne nous sommes pas fait assez de mal les uns aux autres? Est-ce que nous ne nous sommes pas étreints d'assez près pendant des années impitoyables pour apprendre à nous comprendre et à nous aimer? Nous sommes les deux nations de l'Europe qui ont l'une de l'autre l'expérience la plus complète et la plus intime.¹

He was to live long enough to know of the agreements signed at the Palais de Chaillot on 23 October 1954. The entry of Germany into NATO and into the Western European Union gave further encouragement to his hopes that he was witnessing the end of Franco-German enmity and the beginning of a new Europe.² A man of extremes - often bigoted, bellicose, reactionary - Claudel had also been a man of vision. Despite the many inconsistencies in his thought, and his distasteful ability to often see the end as justifying the means, he had undoubtedly given the best of himself to the ideal of unity. If the society of his own country, and of the world as a whole, remained cruelly divided during his last years, it was nevertheless fitting that he should have been able to see at least a small part of his dream fulfilled.

1. id.

2. See Jo. II, p.876, (26 Oct. 1954).

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis makes no claim to have provided a definitive account of every aspect of Claudel's political thought. Limitations of time and space have necessitated a concentration on certain central preoccupations at the expense of many possible byways branching out from the main path. Moreover, there are potentially rich sources of evidence which remain to come to light; notably, the large collections of correspondence which are still in the possession of individuals who have not yet chosen to make them available to researchers. That much said, I believe that this study has produced a sufficient body of evidence to give an accurate picture of the essential characteristics of his thinking on political questions during the period for which reliable material is available.

Perhaps the most obvious conclusion to be drawn is that Claudel's most consistent trait was his inconsistency. It should, of course, be emphasised that there is a danger of exaggerating the extent of inconsistencies when one is examining the ideas of a man - particularly a writer as prolific as Claudel - on the basis of what is often ephemeral material produced over a very long period of time. Nevertheless, Claudel was a man of deep contradictions. He himself was aware of the fact. Indeed, he even remarked on one occasion that they were reflected in the contrast between the upper,

and the lower halves of his face.¹ His inner conflicts provided much of the tension in his creative writings. They accounted for the intriguing if sometimes wearisome confusions in his philosophical theories and his Biblical exegeses. Nowhere were they more evident than in his politics, for Claudel could swing so rapidly (sometimes almost in the same sentence) between different attitudes - from savage intransigence to moderation, pragmatism or detachment, or, at the other extreme, to a visionary, near-utopian idealism. And, of course, he could draw on a vast range of stylistic registers - often juxtaposed in the most unlikely contexts - in which to express them.

What then of the charges that were levelled at Claudel by his political detractors at the time of his death? We have seen that most of the comments made about him did contain some degree of truth. Claudel's capacity for savage reaction against the modern world was certainly real enough. The sweeping condemnations which he pronounced during the years before the First World War - his denunciations of abandonment of the Church, his tirades against materialistic values, against the obsessive pursuit of self-interest among rich and poor alike, against the reduction of human service to the notion of economic exchange, his horror of the dehumanising

1. See Jo. I, p. 256 (June 1913): "Contradiction dans ma figure; le front et le nez puissants, puis une petite bouche naïve, un petit menton faible, gras et indécis. Mon nez est au service de mon front, mais non pas de mon menton. Non! Cette petite bouche fine, extraordinairement vibrante et délicate. Laquelle l'emportera des deux parties de ma figure?"

effects of labour conditions in modern industry, of Malthusianism and the erosion of the family - were all to have many echoes in his later writings. So too was his wariness of the encroaching power of the centralised State, and his contempt for the divisive, corrupt, inefficient system of parliamentary government. To this extent Claudel's thinking was indelibly marked by the polarised climate of a period during which he, like many Catholic writers, had seen the political attack on the Church as but one particularly evil manifestation of the fundamental malaise afflicting the nation.

Moreover, as some of his critics suggested, there were strong elements of traditionalism, conservatism and authoritarianism in Claudel's thought. Although the type of social and political changes which he would have wished to see during the pre-1914 period had not represented a complete return to the patterns of the ancien régime, they had been conceived in opposition to the Revolution and had been broadly in line with the thinking of the royalist Right. He had defended traditional moral values of order, willing submission, personal loyalty, acceptance of inequality and paternal care for the weak. He had praised the Church, the family and the corporation or conservative Catholic syndicat because, among other reasons, he saw them as moral bastions against the impersonal power of the centralised State. He had admired the ideal of the Catholic monarch, providing a benign, unifying authority over the nation.

None of these ideas changed fundamentally in later years. However, they did evolve to some degree, for although Claudel's

outbursts against the modern world undoubtedly corresponded to an important facet of his thinking, there was also the side of him which could accept the present and, as time passed, feel an increasing willingness to look ahead to the future. It is significant that even during the years before the First World War, when his mood was strongly tilted towards reaction, he should nevertheless have drawn a flattering comparison between the dynamic development of Christian Europe and the stagnation of the East, despite the affection which he may have felt for the traditional agrarian civilisation of China. Moreover, as we observed, his solution to the question of China's future had been the imposition of a coherent europeanised administration and a vast programme of public works to develop the country.

It was this essential ambivalence in Claudel's thinking which allowed him to adapt his ideas to changing conditions, and notably to the social upheavals caused by two world wars. The social and political objectives which he favoured during the inter-war years and after the Liberation were an extension of the views which he had held before 1914. The fundamental goal of moral unity was the same. The idea of association at grass-roots level grew into his enthusiasm for co-operative organisation in various forms, including the bastardised version which he proposed for industry. He remained wary of the power of the State, especially where it threatened private ownership, but he was willing to accept the idea of economic planning in the interests of rational organisation.

The idea of the strong leader continued to hold its appeal for him but the manner in which he conceived government appeared increasingly technocratic.

We have seen that Claudel's critics were also right when they saw him as a jingoist and a bellicist. Even by the standards of the patriotic literature produced in France during the First World War, his invective against the Satanic Protestant **hordes** who had invaded Catholic France shows an extraordinary savagery. The same type of reaction was apparent on the eve of the war in 1940 or when the French hold on Indo-China was being broken in the late 1940s. The forcible subjection of small or backward nations could be justified on the grounds that they were being opened up to contact with a wider world in fulfilment of a historical or geographical necessity. War, as such, could be seen (with some justice) as a paradoxically creative phenomenon which produced change and movement through cathartic contact between nations.

Yet Claudel's approach to international relations had many other sides. As a consul he spent many years acting as an agent of French trading interests abroad. It was already apparent in his writings on the subject of China before 1914 that his thinking was moulded by the expansionist mentality of the period. He assumed that trade should know no frontiers, whether in the form of natural geographical barriers or the invisible barriers created by

man, since the circulation of products and capital was the life-blood of the world. Trade required the efficient development of natural resources, and the penetration of physical obstacles impeding circulation. This, in turn, implied the establishment of rapid communication and transportation networks - themselves the product of advanced technology. Likewise, it required the removal, as far as possible, of artificial obstacles in the form of protectionist tariffs, monetary anomalies and the like. From this stemmed the idea that while the stimulus of competition might be valuable, complete anarchy was not. More could be achieved by the wider grouping. In his programme of reforms for China, Claudel had thought in terms of diplomatic concert and economic consortium among the imperialist Powers to initiate the necessary changes. All of these ideas continued to develop in later years in the light of Claudel's observation of contemporary events. The idea of economic consortium was extended in his enthusiasm for schemes of jointly developing colonial territories or in his support for European economic integration. The idea of diplomatic concert was reflected later in his support for collective security and federalism in the international realm. What attracted Claudel in all this was not only his belief in the need for rational organisation, but also his taste for the grand design, the broad sweeping scheme, of which the details concerned him relatively little since he believed them to be the domain of pragmatic negotiations taking account of the balance of power and the interests involved.

Claudé's belief in the need for practical collaboration in the international field also fed upon and, in its turn, nourished his attachment to the universalist aspect of his religion. His conception of universal brotherhood in Catholicism, and the notion of God-given complementary differences between nations was, of course, two-sided. It could provide a further justification for imperialism, but it equally expressed itself in his wider belief in the idea of Providential movement towards the unity of mankind through conflict and reconciliation, catastrophe and construction.

Finally, to return to the charges levelled at Claudé at the time of his death, what of the question of opportunism? Certainly, Claudé's willingness to accommodate himself to successive régimes does not appear to have been entirely divorced from considerations of self-interest. But it has been shown that his approach also owed much to a genuine belief that the Catholic should submit to established authority whether or not it corresponded to his own preferences. Indeed, Claudé was wary of his own tendency to revolt. Moreover, it was characteristic of his thinking that neither his enmity nor his allegiance were ever given unreservedly. Claudé disliked ideological systems. He disliked political parties. His enthusiasm could be fired by individual leaders, but they could easily fail him. Probably, he would never have been entirely at ease under any regime.

Claud l was an extraordinarily various and enigmatic man. At times he seemed to be totally at odds with the age in which he lived: at others he appeared to be a sounding-board for many of the confused aspirations of a restless era which saw the most profound changes in French society and in the world as a whole. Taken individually, his ideas on any given question were not necessarily original or especially profound, but taken as a whole, in all its different levels and dimensions, his political thought has a certain sprawling grandeur and an idiosyncratic quality which defies conventional political classifications.

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