

## SUMMARY

### **François Mauriac and the Fallen Being Seeking Love**

#### A Theological and Hermetical Approach to François Mauriac's Work

In the celestial vault of universal literature François Mauriac is yet another bright star of France that had joined the generation of Christian existentialist generation, centered around the one nicknamed „the Dostoievsky of France”<sup>531</sup> and the Russian paragon, the one and only Dostoevsky. He trode up to a certain point in the footsteps of Bernanos, aware of his affinity for the person in the crowd, for the fallen being that cannot live up to sainthood, but that has, nonetheless, the chance of the lost sheep from the Gospel. In the Russian religious spirit, eminently Orthodox, Mauriac discovered many similarities with his inner self, more likely originating from his own life experience and subtly hinted, rather than expressed in a programmatic way at the level of his work.

This paper does not address the theme of love throughout the work of Mauriac, but, instead, starting from its perception and experience in the context of the fallen being – that is to say between the characters of the novels and their creator -, we will follow the synthetic perspective of a mainly moral theological view, emphasizing the iconographical ontology of the human being as a being of communion.

The fiber running across the whole length of the paper is interwoven from the truth of Mauriac's own reflection: «Love does indeed exist in this world, but it is

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<sup>531</sup> Georges Bernanos

crucified and so are we at its side»<sup>532</sup>.

In **Chapter I** we follow Mauriac the child through «the desert of love» in which he was born, knowing that the writer he carries inside is he himself following his characters, all of them arduously seeking the love that could quench the thirst and satisfy the hunger of the soul.

François Mauriac is one of the billions of human beings whose chief desire had been love. Although often plagued by sadness as a child, although excessively loved by his mother, his first love and the one that filled his soul with joy was Christ, our Lord born in a manger. And this unseen love had never left him, filling the void of fatherly love, abating the tumult of carnal passions risen in young age, safeguarding his childhood purity until the end of his life and, last but not least, offering him the gift of *agapè* love. This gift had been also put to work through the scriptural and verbal commitment he had undertaken so as to defend the rights of the underprivileged, labeled as «mal-aimés». Moreover, the selfless love directed at the living, his contemporaries, is completed by the deep love for the dead, those who preceded him genealogically.

Mauriac the man had known personally the shortcomings and dissatisfactions of purely human love, love that does not stem from the spirit of self-sacrifice, but from selfishness. The three stages of his life can be summed up as follows: «not to love yet», «to love» and «not to love anymore» with passion and in an conditional way. Maturity brings along that wisdom in which love is no longer demanded, but gifted. Afterwards, deceptions can have, depending on their essence, an beneficial role. One starts to love the other the way he or she really is and, at the same time, dive into God's ever-enduring love.

**Chapter II** opens with the comparative exegesis of the concept of „fallen being”, not only from the point of view of the Jansenist doctrine, doctrine that made a powerful impression on Mauriac since childhood and that would partially mark his future writings, but also from the Catholic and Orthodox points of view, that do not minimize Christ's redeeming work. From the author's very confessions we infer

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<sup>532</sup> Fr. Mauriac, *L'Agneau*, Paris, Éditions Flammarion, 1985, p. 130.

that at a rational level he could never have agreed with Jansenism, but that instinctively he had yielded to its influence, and that as a fully fledged novelist. The proof for that is the acute feeling of guilt his characters inexplicably experience. He rejected from the very beginning the theory of absolute predestination and what actually fascinated him about Pascal was the complete letting go of the self and the power of faith. This model is difficult to follow because of the acute and tormenting feeling of ceaseless fight against human passions and weaknesses, a reason why Mauriac felt much closer to Racine.

Mauriac was first and foremost a novel-writing Catholic, but what is of essence for us is his inner feeling, generally compatible with nature of Orthodoxy. As such, it is beyond the realm of possibility that the God of love would deprive some men of redemption on a whim. Not only would God be contradicting Himself, but He would also deny His greatest work. And, as the ultimate vocation of the human being seen as „*imago Dei*” is that of love, how can there be true love in the absence of freedom? Mauriac ascertains that indeed, through sin, man had fallen from Grace, but not also out of God’s love; free will had weakened but did not succumb; human nature had not been completely destroyed, but it is still capable of moral good but not without God’s Grace.

We have briefly tackled the Occidental disputes regarding the contest between man’s freedom and Grace, perceived by Catholicism as an impersonal force, because we have identified it here and there in some of Mauriac’s novels, in which the character’s freedom appears to be beset by an *exciting and determining Grace* (ex. *L’Enfant chargé de chaînes*, *Un Adolescent d’autrefois*, *L’Agneau*). We are not dealing here with a *teandric synergy* designating man’s co-operation with Grace, seen as uncreated Godly energy, that is to say with the Holy Ghost’s personal involvement, from the outset to the end, through the complete assertion of the two freedoms, Divine and human. Synergy implies free and responsible love between God and man and, implicitly, among men.

Love lies at the very base of clerical life, as well as being the foundation of

all human interactions. Misunderstanding their freedom, Mauriac's characters facilitate willy-nilly the spread of all evils, not only at community level, but also at an universal scale: the heavens weep and darken as man's face is becoming more repulsive for lack of true love, and the burning of the pine-trees merges with the burning of human passions. Despite this historic and metaphysical cataclysm, Mauriac's optimism combines with our own and through the co-operation between Holy Grace and human will, any evil can be changed to good, any vice can become a virtue.

In the smelter of the work in question, the Janseist world of François' childhood crept in without allowing Mauriac the writer to object. Everything he would transpose in his literary world is distilled from his inner ocean, and thus he will live in many of his *characters*<sup>533</sup> which serve as «mirrors» of their own maker. (Example: Bob Lagave and Pierre Gornac from the novel *Destins*, Jean-Paul Johannet from *L'Enfant chargé de chaînes*, Jacques – the hero of *La robe prétexte*, Alain Gajac from *Un Adolescent d'autrefois*). The instinctive influence of Janseism accounts for a great deal of the similarities between the characters of Mauriac and Racine, all of them drenched in an atmosphere of doom. (Example: Thérèse Desqueyroux and Phèdre).

The fallen man, described so sympathetically by Mauriac, is a contradictory man, in which the extremes come into contact, torn between sinfulness and righteousness, love and hate, light and darkness, God and devil. What matters is that the writer would ultimately bring him at the foot of the Cross (Louis – the hero of the novel *Noed de vipères*, Gabriel Gradère from *Les Anges noirs*, Thérèse Desqueyroux from *La Fin de la nuit*), guided by the light of Grace or by an angel. (Xavier, Father Forcas). Holiness is not just the vocation of a few chosen ones, but also God's calling to everyone. Even a stone heart has the chance of progressively transforming into a heart of flesh, even towards the end of life or on the death-bed, if it is willing to witness God's existence as Love and Light.

**Chapter III**, devoted to *the odyssey of carnal love*, we analysed another

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<sup>533</sup> Taking after Proust's, Flaubert's, Stendhal's model.

core principle of Janseism, which, unlike predestination, had encountered a much more fertile soil in Mauriac's extremely scrupulous thought. We are referring to "concupiscence", attacked by the Janseists in all faces of human life and blamed by the Catholics even in Christian wedlock. In the writer's catholic vision, concupiscence is identified as an inherent characteristic of humanity, which entails an less than optimistic ontology and anthropology, with repercussions in the clerical life.

If in the first chapter we have already introduced the term *concupiscence* in its general meaning of devouring pleasure separated from reason and susceptible to cause the full array of sins, we took this opportunity to explain the concept better, mainly through references to *libido sentiendi*, the carnal desire, including sexual pleasure and its substitutes.

*Libido sentiendi*, *libido sciendi* and *libido dominandi* are the three burning rivers cutting through Mauriac's soul, but the first seems to be the most dreadful. When faced with the opposite sex, *fascination* is not triggered by a standardized exterior beauty, but by a certain charm, or by inner beauty, or by the appeal of virginity, or simply by mere curiosity. Regarding feminine outer beauty, what initially draws male characters seems to be the upper part of the body. Unfortunately, woman is generally perceived as a perishable fruit.

Language has the power to heal the partner's inferiority complexes, but also to ruin the fragile edifice of love. Only diaphanous eyes are able to notice uncreated Beauty in created beauty, to protect the human being from the danger of reification or of the praising of a person and this way anticipating sainthood through resurrection (ex. Alain Gajac facing Jeannette's beauty).

In Mauriac's work, *fascination* resembles the flickering light of a candle, easily put out by a gust of wind. As for the arranged marriages between beautiful-ugly or young-old couples (example Jean Péloueyre și Noémi d'Artiailh), the initial pleasure, in general imagined, quickly becomes disgust and even hatred.

The vivid impression produced on the opposite sex or lived by the latter is usually followed by *attempts to seduce*. Studying the couples Daniel Trasis –

Gisèle de Plailly Gabriel Gradère – Adila Du Buch, we have noticed that a so-called *ars seductionis* is out of the question. Men are the seducers, with an extensive experience in conquering women, but they all lack tact, honesty and seriousness. They nonetheless observe the classical stages of the seduction game: *being noticed, exchange of glances and conversation*, but the finality can only be unhappy. Verbal and vocal seduction are subdued by the appeal of smell and gesture, even though none is calculated.

Regarding body language, *the look* and *the smile* are elements of non-verbal communication, crucial for conveying either love or its opposite. In this vein, we have discovered several types: a loving gaze accompanied by a sincere smile (Marthe Balzon), the scrutinizing and indecent glance (Daniel Trasis) entailing a silly smile (Marie Ransinangue), an intense and shameless stare (Marie Ransinangue), the conciliatory look and smile (Jean-Paul and Marthe), the hurried peek (Jean-Paul), the cunning look (Gisèle de Plailly) and the shy glance (Jean Péloueyre).

*Physical closeness* is conditioned not only by beauty and body language, but especially by the degree of compatibility of the souls, along with religious convictions. At the outset of love, the mere presence of the other seems to suffice. But once the sexual act consumed, they unavoidably fall prey to the opposition pleasure-pain, which is in fact Mauriac's dialectics.

Sexuality does not occupy its rightful place because it is harassed either by *obsession* (Raymond Courrèges; the unnamed rapist; Daniel Trasis; Gabriel Gradère) or by *hatred* (Mme. Duprouy; Brigitte Pian). Irony makes that the obsessed person ends up hating the very object of their infatuation.

**Chapter IV** deals with both the cases of desperate lovers and those who are „mal-aimés”, disappointed. So, the *ability to transfigure* – of the beloved, of her words and gestures – disappears (ex. Yves Frontenac; Alain Gajac). But there are small exceptions, when hopeless love becomes steady marital affection (ex. Marthe and Jean-Paul).

In general, all of Mauriac's couples are made up of „mal-aimants” and „mal-

aimés", which causes a great deal of tension within the couple and triggers terrifying *dramas*, whose innocent victims are the children (ex. Louis/Élisabeth; Louis/Isa).

*The grief* caused by love, immoral as it may be, has a *purifying role* of passions, divine pedagogy employing sentimental failures in order to teach man the lesson of meekness and to slowly learn to love his peer into Christ. Through the anchorite fight against carnal passions, the frustrations, abuse and deceptions the Eros has to bear, can be perceived as celebrations of *agapè* love, capable to alter both body and soul. The adulterous woman, tho whom Mauriac devotes an entire chapter in *The Life of Christ*, restores hope to all fallen beings tormented by the demon of adultery, but which, through repentance, decide to convert their lives. The study of Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* consolidates our analysis.

A different kind of human attachment that had caught our attention is *friendship (philia)*, conditioned by youth, physical beauty and intelligence, qualities that are more likely to cause admiration than love. We encounter here a „*mal-amitié*” because of several reasons: it is not mutual, it is exclusive, arrogant, despising, and feigned (Jean-Paul/ Vincent; Jean-Paul/ Georges Élie; Maryan/ Lange; Alain Gajac/ Simon Duberc; Alain Gajac/ André Donzac; Gilles Salone/ Nicolas Plassac), and in some cases it can even disappear (Hervé de Blénauge/ Marcel). The woman is out of the question, seen to be unfit for friendship. On the one hand, instead of cementing the friendship between two men, she helps destroy it more or less consciously. On the other hand, between a young man and a young woman, the only possible understanding is the sexual one. The triangular relationship sister-brother-friend brings in the foreground three diverging passions: the brother's passion for his sister, the lover's passion for his beloved and the friend's passion for his friend.

**Chapter V** follows the *interest* that connects, or better still disconnects, the majority of the characters and, indeed, most people together. Even our *love of Christ* is an interested love with the purpose of overcoming daily problems and the

savagery of the world. This accounts why Jean-Paul Johannet feels enslaved by a doctrine and not the step-son of a materialized liberating love. Neither him, nor Alain Gajac can put in practice God's most important commandment (Mt 22, 37-39) because their love is not rooted in Christ's uninterrupted love. On the contrary, it fills a wasteland: *the dessert of loving one's self*, the breeding ground of all passions, even those hidden under the mask of excessive kindness (ex. la baronne de Cernès).

In relation with an *arranged marriage*, love is either the promised fruit (ex. by Noémi's parents), an illusion (Thérèse Desqueyroux), unexistent (Paule de Cernès), or a tedious obligation (Philip, Janine's husband) and all the suffering characters end up living in existentialist disgust.

**Chapter VI** looks at the antydote for solipsist egocentric love, antydote that appears especially in Mauriac's theological writings<sup>534</sup>. It is *Agapè*, Christ's love that serves as the model for love among humans. Mauriac the Catholic emphasizes the suffering of the cross in love and we, as Orthodox, accentuate the joy of Resurrection, conditioned, of course, by the cross. The „crucified” redeeming love noticed by Jean de Mirbel is none other than the creationist Divine love confiremed by Alain Gajac.

*The Incarnation* represents *the secret of the Creator's Love* toward his fallen creature, secret wich He wants to be permanently worked in the inside of His believers. Behold the biggest wonder for Mauriac: we can be Christ<sup>535</sup>, if we allow Him to grow inside us. The christification (theosis) is complementary to the *chenosis*, truth wonderfully demonstrated by the Holy Maxim the Confessor and by Nicholas Cabasila.

Mauriac speaks about a Godly calling any Christian feels to carry his cross. *The cross* – something ridiculous for the unbelievers – is the *revelation of selfless love* of cosmical dimensions, all the way, whitout any inkling of masochism. In consensus with the *teopatic principle* of Christian life advocated by the Eastern

<sup>534</sup> *Dieu et Mammon* (1929), *Souffrances et bonheur du chrétien* (1931), *Vie de Jésus* (1936), *Le Fils de l'Homme* (1958), *Ce que je crois* (1962).

<sup>535</sup> Fr. Mauriac, *Nouveaux Mémoires intérieurs*, Paris, Flammarion, 1965, p. 283.



Fathers, Mauriac confirms the power to love that Christ, the same crucified and exalting Christ, offers us through sacrament to ease our quest for Heaven.

*Motherly love* and *the love for enemies* represents the most accurate expression of selfless love, one that is spontaneous and the other acquired through fight. Concerning the first, with one exception (Blanche Frontenac – woman of duty), the mothers in Mauriac's works disappoint the reader by their selfishness and desire to possess possess (Félicité Cazenave, Mathilde, Lucienne Révolou, Léonie Costadot), or carelessness and lies (Jean de Mirbel's mother) or by the disgust – or even hatred – they experience towards their offspring (Paule de Cernès), or by their bigot piety – a reason of harmful isolation for the child – (Mme Dézaymeries). As for the second – *love thy enemy* –, Mauriac indicates the way in which we can achieve that, the way to express it: *complete and utter self-sacrifice*, and also its useful by-products: victory over selfishness, over evil and over death.

*Conjugal love* is also called upon to reach the peak of selfless love, through mutual devotion, through procreation, through voluntary self-sacrifice, through growing together in the love of God. Thus, outside the realms of Christ and Church, marriage is in danger of becoming a *sacrilege* of divine law (Gn 1, 28). Mauriac advocates for procreation and also for chastity, in case one of the two does not want any more children. We have analyzed in this context the two visions, Catholic and Orthodox, of the conjugal erotic act, family planning and enforced abstinence. Coming back to Mauriac's heroes, the most frustrated in their love and maternity seem to be Paule de Cernès and Thérèse Desqueyroux – with the mention that for the novel, marriage is nothing but the favourable sociological background for the exterior conflicts of the torn self of every fallen character. The suggested remedy: having faith in the repetition of the miracle performed by God at the wedding in Cana of Galilee.

The patristic literature saves marriage from the reductionist laws, seen as utilitary and legalistic, bringing it back in the churchly liturgical-sacramental time and space. Christian love in marriage is just as an epactetic spiral, which binds three constitutive realities: the birth, the cross and the grandeur of the Resurrection.

In **chapter VII** we have shown the necessity of a *pedagogy of love*, founding our argument on Mauriac's treaty: *L'Éducation des filles*.

The art of love needs to be passed down from father to son because love entails eternity. Love and education must be combined and if emphasis is put on the formation of young girls, that is because the best teachers are the mothers themselves, the very salvation of the world being in their hands. The bleak picture of the feminine condition portrayed by the writer depicts several painful images: the woman-slave, the woman-beast-of-burden, the tyrannized woman, the resigned, victimized woman, the woman devoured alive. These are all possible dangers and it's the educator's duty to explain them to the future mother and wife so that she would not end up trapped in the tragedy of divorce, concubinage or prostitution. Three different categories of souls are of interest for the keen psychologist and educator from Bordeaux: the suffering souls of the women who fulfil their duty, the corrupt souls of the women who allow themselves to be bought and the clean souls of spinsters.

As for the education of children, boys and girls, a parental *modus vivendi* is determinant, although inheritance has a substantial influence as well. Moreover, it is preferable that the education of the soul have priority over that of the body. The object of Christian education is self-fulfilment in God, a sine qua non condition of a successful human life: salvation.

*Mauriac's reflections concerning the feminist move* baffle us by their objective realism, which hides, none the less, a note of personal subjectivity. For Mauriac, the accomplishments of feminism are doubtful because they are forced. A woman's main condition is that of a wife and, if necessary, that of procreation. But bodily maternity loses its value outside spiritual maternity and a good education of children. Throughout Mauriac's work, the feminist character we have looked at in detail is the multidimensional Thérèse Desqueyroux.

**The last chapter** (VIII) closes this thesis with the person of Mauriac as a *master of love between already and not yet*. The main idea is that man has to become initiated here, on Earth, in the love of God so as to win not only earthly

happiness but also eternal bliss, materialized by the face to face contemplation of the God-Love relation. This initiation implies a few clearly defined steps: faith, prayer, spiritual life and love, steps that we should learn since childhood, in the marvelous company of an *eucharistic God*. Unforgettable despite the flow of time, childhood offers the possibility to celebrate resurrection at any given time, by the most fallen human being. This is Mauriac's optimism accompanied by Christian realism: man has the privilege to taste, *here and now*, the paradise of love between already and not yet!