

YVES DE MONTCHEUIL: ACTION, JUSTICE, AND THE KINGDOM IN SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE TO NAZISM¹

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The few extant studies of Jesuit martyr and theologian Yves de Montcheuil focus on his life and theology. This article combines these considerations with philosophical and political ones by examining how Montcheuil's spiritual resistance to Nazism emerges from his study of action and justice in the thought of Nicolas Malebranche and Maurice Blondel. Montcheuil's oeuvre culminates in a lived theology of sacrifice, and shows how the French war experience contributed to doctrinal development in areas such as faith and action, liberation theology, church-state relations, and lay ecclesiology.

IN RECENT DECADES, deep reflection and impassioned debate have been provoked in Christian theology by the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi regime against the Jewish people and other groups, the personal suffering inflicted on numerous individual lives, and the countless heroic

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¹ Abbreviations for frequently cited works of Yves de Montcheuil are:

AC—*Aspects of the Church* (Chicago: Fides, 1955); trans. of *Aspects de l'Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1951).

GS—*A Guide for Social Action* (Chicago: Fides, 1954); rare trans. of *L'Église et le monde actuel* (Paris: Témoignage chrétien, 1946), lacking chaps. 8 and 9 of original.

LC—*Leçons sur le Christ*, ed. Joseph Huby (Paris: L'Épi, 1949).

MA—*For Men of Action* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Dome, 1964); trans. of *Problèmes de vie spirituelle* (Paris: JECF, 1945).

MQ—*Malebranche et le quietisme* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1946).

MT—*Mélanges théologiques* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1946).

PR—Introduction to Maurice Blondel, *Pages religieuses* (Paris: Aubier, 1942).

RE—*Le Royaume et ses exigences* (Paris: L'Épi, 1957).

Most of these works were edited by Henri de Lubac. Citations from them will appear in the text.

acts of resistance to persecution. Much of this theology has German and Protestant origins, and has posed many searching and challenging questions: Where was God in Auschwitz? Why did God constitute the world in such a way that unjust suffering on a massive scale was possible? What is the place or value of suffering in God's plan for the salvation of the world? In this article, while in no way denying the crucial importance of these and associated questions, I want to consider a different type of theological response to Nazism, one found in the writing and witness of a little known Jesuit theologian and martyr.

Yves de Montcheuil provided the spiritual resistance of the French Church to Nazism with major theological impetus and practical assistance.² Henri de Lubac, writing in 1987, nevertheless described him as "almost forgotten," while Étienne Fouilloux, in 1995, referred to his progressively declining theological influence over the preceding quarter century as a "second death."³ Born in 1900 in Paimpol on the north coast of Brittany, Montcheuil attended a Jesuit college in St. Helier on Jersey and entered the Society of Jesus in 1917, remaining in St. Helier at the Maison Saint-Louis. This was an exile: clergy and members of religious orders were not permitted to teach in French schools following the 1902 Combes legislation secularizing the education system, and parents who wanted their children to have a religious education had to send them abroad, often to religious communities in exile. In 1919, Montcheuil commenced his Jesuit training in Canterbury, which was interrupted by two years' compulsory military service in France. Having earned a licentiate in philosophy from the Sorbonne, in 1934, following four years of theological study in Lyons, he received a doctorate from the Gregorian University in Rome. He then accepted a teaching post at the Institut Catholique in Paris, which he held until being shot by the Gestapo on August 10, 1944.⁴ Montcheuil was among the most theologically significant Catholic martyrs of the Second World War, developing a theology of action, justice, and the kingdom that he lived out in active spiritual witness against Nazism.

² Renée Bédarida, "Théologie et guerre idéologique," in *Henri de Lubac et le mystère de l'Église*, ed. Michel Sales et al. (Paris: Cerf, 1999) 216–17.

³ Henri de Lubac, *Three Jesuits Speak: Yves de Montcheuil, 1899–1944; Charles Nicolet, 1897–1961; Jean Zupan, 1899–1968* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987) 32; Étienne Fouilloux, *Yves de Montcheuil, philosophe et théologien jésuite (1900–1944)* (Paris: Médiasèvres, 1995) 45.

⁴ For biographical sketches, see Fouilloux, *Yves de Montcheuil*; René d'Ouinç, "Les Enfances religieuses du Père de Montcheuil," in *Jésuites de l'Assistance de France 1958/4* 3–12; see also <http://www.fondation-montcheuil.org> (accessed May 14, 2007).

LOVE, JUSTICE, AND ACTION IN MALEBRANCHE

Montcheuil's doctoral thesis, "L'Intervention de Malebranche dans la querelle du pur amour," addressed the notion of disinterested love (*l'amour désintéressé*) in the Augustinian theology of Nicholas Malebranche, and sought to resolve aspects of the disputes about whether or not this conception of love amounted to a quietist one. Montcheuil wished to demonstrate the impossibility of any apolitical notion of love, arguing that a true love of self is inseparable from the self's love of God and of justice. These loves might, moreover, have practical implications, and call people of faith to shape the world in greater conformity with the order of justice divinely willed for it.

Malebranche had argued, in his 1680 *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, that God acts in nature mostly by means of his general will.⁵ This enabled Malebranche to develop an account of the existence of natural evils not as directly willed by God, but as the result of God willing a world reflecting divine wisdom and simplicity by producing the greatest number of effects by means of the fewest laws. Malebranche believed, as an occasionalist, that God is the only true cause of effects in nature, but also maintained that human freedom is among the greatest of the effects of divine wisdom.

These intuitions provide the background to Malebranche's 1684 *Treatise on Ethics*, which argued that moral action requires a love of the immutable order that God reveals to those souls under grace.⁶ Malebranche insisted that God is the greatest human good, on the grounds that God is the sole origin of happiness. He believed, moreover, that morally good action, being grounded in God, confers happiness on the self. If God is the soul's greatest good, and love of God is necessary for the moral life, then acting morally will necessarily have the effect of bringing the soul happiness. Malebranche insisted—unsurprisingly, in light of the importance of human freedom in his theodicy—that the love needed for moral action required the free exercise of the will. The good will freely strives to be guided by the objective relations of perfection that pertain among the various different possible objects of love. The intensity of the soul's love for particular objects should, moreover, match the order of perfection of those objects, with those situated in the higher attainable orders being sought in preference to those in the lower ones.

In 1699, Malebranche published his *Treatise on the Love of God*, accom-

⁵ Nicolas Malebranche, "Illustration," in *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, trans., intro., and notes Patrick Riley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) 195–204.

⁶ Nicolas Malebranche, *Treatise on Ethics*, trans. and intro. Craig Walton (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993).

panied by *Three Letters to Lamy*.⁷ In these writings, he rejected the charge of François Lamy (1636–1711) that his *Treatise on Ethics* advocated the quietist position that moral action is derived from a disinterested “pure love” of God. This is the controversy on which Montcheuil focuses, believing it to be crucial to a proper understanding of Malebranche’s theology of love (*MQ* 16) and, more widely, to the rehabilitation of Malebranche as a figure of theological and spiritual stature. Malebranche stated clearly his belief that a disordered love of self should be contrasted not with pure love of God, as in the quietist position with which Lamy had identified him, but rather with an ordered love of creation that includes the soul’s love of itself. The political implications of his theory are most clearly elucidated in the chapter of Montcheuil’s study of Malebranche on “Disinterested Love of Man on Earth” (*MQ* 249–308). Earthly loves need to be ordered in such a way that the hierarchy of perfections is respected (*MQ* 253). This principle establishes a close relation between the soul’s love of God and its love of justice and order: in fact, true love of God is nothing other than the love of order and justice. This is because the idea of God as justice—or, more specifically, as sovereign justice—provides a better means of regulating the soul’s particular loves than any other idea of God that the imagination presents to the mind (*MQ* 255–56). Justice establishes the ordering of loves in the world and the right priorities and relations among their objects. The divine origin of justice means, however, that the *just order cannot be equated with a particular state of affairs existing at a particular time*. Montcheuil continues:

Order is not a simple object of contemplation, but a rule for action. The divine will acts necessarily, and in a sense infallibly, in conformity with order. In so doing, God does not obey a foreign law, but remains faithful to his proper nature: the law that directs him, he began by establishing, not by a contingent decision, but by virtue of his being. For humankind, it is different: Order imposes itself as an obligation to which humankind submits; humankind is not legislator. In this sense order is heteronomous. (*MQ* 256)

Malebranche’s opposition to quietism thus becomes clearly apparent: love is intrinsically active, and requires obedience to a divine will. The quietist identification of the love of God with pure, disinterested love suggests, Montcheuil implies, a confusion of earthly human love with the love of the saints in heaven, which he had discussed in the preceding chapter. Only for the saints can the love of God be identified with pure love, rather than with concrete precepts of justice. In earthly life, the heteronomy to which Montcheuil refers will always operate, imposing on humanity the *obligation to*

⁷ Nicolas Malebranche, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 14, *Traité de l’amour de Dieu: Trois lettres et réponse générale au R. P. Lamy* (Paris: Vrin, 1963).

make the best possible use of its free will in accordance with the rule that order provides for it.

In his defence of Malebranche against Lamy, Montcheuil nevertheless identifies a tension in Malebranche's own theory of love between the pursuit of justice and of happiness. Malebranche had perceived an unproblematic relation between the two: the soul working to promote justice would be seeking the best particular representation of its love of God, and would thus gain happiness. Montcheuil reacts critically to this supposition: "If pleasure were the end of love and of the action that inspires it, one would wish that God would change, that he cease always to provide the model of justice for us, in order that we be happier, as we deserve. If this is not the case, that is because God is truly the final cause of love" (*MQ* 267).

Montcheuil here identifies a division, denied by Malebranche, between the soul's happiness and its ultimate desire for salvation by God. Expressing this distinction in practical terms, Montcheuil identifies situations in which the soul's love of God *prevents* it from loving itself by seeking happiness. He thus relocates love within an eschatological horizon on which indispensable to the soul's love of God is its hope for salvation (*MQ* 274). He suggests that, in cases where a conflict exists between earthly happiness and earthly order, consistency requires that Malebranche privilege order over happiness. The glory of God is nothing other than the realization of order, Montcheuil asserts, and its pursuit demands that the soul desires salvation above all else (*MQ* 287).

Montcheuil's thesis was not in fact published until 1946, two years after his death. Nevertheless, in subsequent articles published during his lifetime, he pursued his attack on an apolitical notion of love. Among the most striking of these is an extended critique of Max Scheler's *Ressentiment*.⁸ Montcheuil sympathizes with Scheler's concern to invigorate the Christian notion of love with the senses of passion, spirit, and nobility that conceptions of love frequently connoted in classical Greek antiquity. Love cannot, however, be understood in the vitalistic fashion that Scheler advocates. In identifying Christian morality with the affirmation of the human spirit, he fails to privilege justice above human flourishing, Montcheuil protests, and in fact effectively dispenses with justice altogether. Scheler "loosens or cuts the bond of real love and its repercussions for the structure of earthly societies and social relationships" (*MT* 205). Montcheuil, while accepting that Jesus did not intend to institute a new political order, asserts in contrast: "Love will be an effort to penetrate everything in the life of humanity

⁸ Yves de Montcheuil, "Le ressentiment dans la vie morale et religieuse d'après Max Scheler," in *MT* 187–225; originally in *Recherches de science religieuse* 27 (1937) 128–64, 309–25; see Max Scheler, *Ressentiment* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961) 83–113.

in order to become the principle of all action. Nothing can remain indefinitely outside this zone of influence” (*MT* 208).

LOVE, JUSTICE, AND ACTION IN BLONDEL

Montcheuil’s study of Maurice Blondel inspired him to develop further his understanding of the relation between faith and action. Blondel’s principal achievement was to provide a philosophical demonstration that the value of action is absolute and its effects universal, on the grounds that the intention motivating action is given to the subject rather than originating within him, and always exceeds the boundaries within which particular concrete actions are conceived.⁹ This interest in Blondel had been germinating for several years: in a letter written while still in the early stages of producing his Malebranche thesis, Montcheuil told Blondel that his philosophy of action “has a significant place in the conception of the interior life that I am little by little constructing.”¹⁰

In 1934, the year of his doctorate, Montcheuil collaborated with Auguste Valensin—who had also introduced Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to Blondel—to produce a collection of extracts from Blondel’s *L’Action*.¹¹ Montcheuil identified in these extracts five key stages in the progressive development of the philosophy of action: the nature and necessity of the moral problem; the realization that action is the only legitimate human response to this problem; the social repercussions of action; the demands of fidelity to one’s action and to God as its absolute sustaining principle; and the social bonds with which action establishes society, politics, the *patrie*, and the whole human community. This publication was significant in being one of the earliest appropriations of Blondel’s philosophy of action by a theologian, making Montcheuil “one of the first and the principal propagators of Blondelian thought within francophone Catholic circles.”¹² Blondel was a controversial figure, and moves were afoot in Rome around this time to place his oeuvre on the Index. The immanentist method of his philosophy of action appeared to undermine the classic distinction between nature and grace by arguing for divine activity within the world and, in particular, in human action. Blondel was, moreover, immersed in left-wing

⁹ See Maurice Blondel, *L’Action: Essai d’une critique de la vie et d’une science de la pratique* (Paris: Alcan, 1893); trans. Oliva Blanchette as *Action: Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2003); see *MA* 76–77.

¹⁰ Yves de Montcheuil, letter of February 25, 1931, reproduced in Foullieux, *Montcheuil* 67–68.

¹¹ Auguste Valensin and Yves de Montcheuil, *Maurice Blondel* (Paris: Gabalda, 1934).

¹² Foullieux, *Montcheuil* 20.

politics, having taught Marc Sangnier, founder of the *Sillon* movement, and Blondel contributed to its journals, conferences, and educational programs, as well as to the *Semaines sociales*. The Jesuit Superior General Wladimir Ledochowski tried to block publication of the Montcheuil-Valensin book, notwithstanding the positive verdict delivered by its *réviseurs* but was too late to do so, as publication was already in progress. He instructed, however, that no second edition be permitted.¹³

Early in the summer of 1938, Montcheuil traveled to Jersey intent on revising his Malebranche thesis for publication. After two months' work, however, he quit and returned to Paris. He said that he could not proceed with his writing amidst the developing European political crisis. Hitler had annexed Austria in March of that year and brutally suppressed all opposition, and France had taken little action beyond routine diplomatic protests. Over the summer, Jews living in Austria were being required to register their property, and those in Italy were subjected to new discriminatory legislation, including in some cases expulsion. In September, large numbers of French reservists began to be mobilized, as Nazi preparations advanced to seize Czechoslovakia. In a letter of November 21, 1938, Montcheuil protested with anguish about the collapse of a political façade of intelligence, honor, duty, and fidelity, in the face of which "nobody seems to be aware of what has really happened. . . . We have been dragged down into this degradation by a generation that will stop at nothing, including treason, in order to ensure that its own social privileges are protected."¹⁴

SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE

In Paris, Montcheuil's writing and teaching assumed a more overtly social and political character intended to exhort Christians to live out the implications of their faith in troubled times and to support them pastorally in so doing. He appealed more widely to what Stephen Schloesser has described as the cultural "mystic realism" that had developed during the interwar period: "the attempt to strip away what was false and ornamental and to grasp a sure and lasting reality."¹⁵

This clearer religious focus, which Montcheuil had adopted by 1938, is identifiable in a second edited collection of Blondel's work, not published until 1942, the year of Ledochowski's death. The volume incorporated a

¹³ Antonio Russo, "Yves de Montcheuil et Maurice Blondel," in *Blondel entre "L'Action" et la "Trilogie": Actes du colloque internationale sur les écrits intermédiaires de Maurice Blondel* (Brussels: Lessius, 2003) 125–39, at 137–38.

¹⁴ Yves de Montcheuil, letter of November 21, 1938, quoted in de Lubac, *Three Jesuits* 23–24. The recipient is unnamed.

¹⁵ Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919–1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2005) 107–8.

wider range of sources than the 1934 volume, but its principal theological trajectory lies in Montcheuil's clearer insistence on the specifically *theological* character of action. Blondel had sought to demonstrate the insufficiency of conceptions of morality that failed to identify action as the fundamental moral good. He had argued, moreover, that the effects of action could not be confined within particular boundaries but were universal, and that implicit in every action was the activity of an absolute principle, that is, God. Montcheuil, in contrast, now inverts the terms of Blondel's argument, which were from action to God; Montcheuil's aim was no longer to demonstrate the necessity of divine activity to human actors, but the necessity of action to the people of God. He reorganized Blondel's material in four sections: the necessity of the religious problem and the insufficiency of attempted naturalist solutions; the truly religious life and its conditions; religious knowledge; and religious action. He prefaced the collection with a detailed interpretive essay on Blondel's oeuvre; interwoven were several themes from his own thesis, above all the importance of will in moral action (*PR* 12–15). In general, moreover, Montcheuil's insistence that faith in God necessarily demands moral action can be seen as a further iteration of his argument about the relation between love and action in Malebranche: love is an active regard for the just ordering of creation. Finally, the function that Blondel advocated for action seems analogous to the function that Malebranche had assigned to justice, which enables the love of God to be rooted in material reality. The significance of action lies in the translation between hypothetical and real faith which it effects: "All the relations posited become, as it were, hypothetically real. Thought ends become real ends: conditions that have been shown to be necessary in order to attain them thus become obligatory means [*moyens*]" (*PR* 28).

Paris fell to Hitler's army in June 1940. Within a month, a new government was in place, and France was divided into an occupied zone in the north, including the capital, and a self-governing southern zone centered on the spa town of Vichy. The latter included the major Jesuit center of Lyons. Montcheuil was confronted in Paris with new practical and intellectual questions about the type of witness that he should be giving against Nazism. Resistance groups increasingly employed operational methods just as questionable as those of the Gestapo, and close involvement in their activities would have compromised the specifically Christian and spiritual character of Montcheuil's own resistance. He recognized that his calling as a priest lay in building up the faith of the people of God by nurturing the roots of their faith and presenting to them its practical implications. The fight against Nazism became for him a battle for faith and for Christian consciences.

The most noteworthy project to which Montcheuil contributed was the distribution of the *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien*, the underground journal

founded in November 1941 largely through the efforts of Pierre Chaillet and Henri de Lubac. Montcheuil was unable to take part in the journal's foundation because he was living in France's occupied zone, but he fostered secret distribution networks for the *Cahiers* in Paris and the occupied north.¹⁶ The *Cahiers* disseminated reliable information about the occupation of France and the Nazi genocide elsewhere, encouraged and exhorted French Christians to conscientious witness, and provided accurate versions of papal pronouncements, which in newspapers were subject to heavy censorship if they appeared at all. The editors of the *Cahiers* also acknowledged the important role of Vatican Radio—in de Lubac's phrase, the "true older brother of the *Cahiers*"¹⁷—in this task. Under the director of its French section, Father Emmanuel Mistaen, the station disseminated both radio broadcasts and, from Marseilles, printed texts of the most significant papal statements.¹⁸ The Vatican resisted continuous German pressure to close it down.

The *Cahiers* included news of resistance to Nazism in other European countries, as well as excerpts from the inspirational writings of Karl Barth, disseminated from his retreat in Basel. In particular, the second issue included extracts from a long letter of Barth's to French Protestants, in which he proclaimed: "Faced with the troubles and obligations of our times, we may not remain as outsiders or spectators. Even those who would like to remain neutral with respect to them, in reality are not. . . . War brings people to a point of clear decision: a 'yes' or a 'no', along with all its consequences. We are all implicated in this opposition, we are all responsible for its birth and existence; and all of us, from one side of the divide or the other, participate in [Nazism's] abolition, whether by collaboration, active participation, guilt, or as victims."¹⁹ The *Cahiers*, while Catholic-directed, thus promoted an ecumenical witness against Nazism.

Montcheuil contributed to an issue of the *Courriers français du témoignage chrétien* an anonymous article on Communism, which some resis-

¹⁶ De Lubac, *Three Jesuits* 24–25.

¹⁷ Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances That Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993) 118.

¹⁸ See Jacques Adler, "The 'Sin of Omission'? Radio Vatican and the anti-Nazi Struggle, 1940–1942," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 50 (2004) 396–406; Renée Bédarida, "La Voix du Vatican (1940–1942): Batailles des ondes et résistance spirituelle," *Revue de l'histoire de l'Église de France* 64 (1978) 215–43.

¹⁹ Karl Barth, "Une question et une prière aux Protestantes de France," *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien* 2 (January 1942), republished in François Bédarida and Renée Bédarida, *La résistance spirituelle, 1941–1944: Les cahiers clandestins du témoignage chrétien* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001) 80–83.

tance groups saw as the future of French politics.²⁰ (The *Courriers* were similar to the *Cahiers* in being a clandestine publication, but the issues were shorter, produced for a wider readership, and addressed more overtly political issues.) Despite his deep commitment to action and justice, Montcheuil stated unambiguously that Christians cannot accept Communist ideology: it is atheist, affirms an ultimate human achievement on earth, grounds human transformation in economic conditions, and suggests that all means are legitimate in pursuit of this end. Certain Communist aspirations, such as those for justice and fraternity, nevertheless express authentic values that can be appropriated in the struggle against Nazi persecution.²¹

Montcheuil regarded with equal suspicion both the right-wing opponents of the Communists within the resistance and the Communists themselves. The reactionary movements possess, like Communist ones, he asserted, purely material values, employ any available means in their efforts to attain their political ends, and defend an exclusivist conception of political order. The unions and conflicts within the resistance movement were complex—including Communists, socialists, Gaullists, regional independence groups, Spanish Republicans, and even Germans—and added practical justification to Montcheuil's theological espousal of a distinctively spiritual resistance rather than direct political action.

What did Montcheuil intend by charging the opponents of Communism (who included many conservative Catholics) with holding purely material values? His argument is not clearly developed, perhaps because of the difficulty of communications in both Vichy and occupied France. De Lubac notes the “sometimes insurmountable obstacles encountered in communication between the two zones” partitioning the country when transmitting and editing urgent and compromising texts.²² There are undertones here of de Lubac's own developing critique of the “pure nature” concept that a “natural” realm existed independently of divine action, which operated in a separate “spiritual” order. What is wrong with purely material values is that they are not founded in a recognition that the whole of nature is necessarily infused with divine grace. This theology has clear antecedents in Blondel's immanentist method, many critics of which failed to see that establishing an independently constituted realm of pure materiality, far from safeguarding divine autonomy and pure activity in the face of pantheist temptations, effectively imposed limitations on divine power in the

²⁰ Yves de Montcheuil, “Communisme,” *Courrier français du témoignage chrétien* 5 (November 1943); in Bédarida, *Résistance spirituelle* 367–70.

²¹ Montcheuil consistently cautioned students engaged in the resistance movement against Marxism. See de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church* 53.

²² De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church* 99.

form of a realm in which divine activity could have no effect. Montcheuil wished to draw attention to the political implications of this theology: his theological opponents were also his political opponents,²³ as they supposed that spiritual values were applicable only to the Church and had no implications for the larger created order.

In a striking editorial in another *Courrier*, Montcheuil urged his readers to study the Apocalypse of John.²⁴ The drama in which the people of God are currently living is, he asserted, “not only a national drama . . . it is at the same time and above all, to the highest degree, a spiritual drama.” He then identified the two beasts of Revelation 13 with the totalitarian domination of both earthly life and spiritual life: “Thus does the totalitarian monster complete itself which is unsatisfied so long as it does not possess, together with all other goods, ‘the bodies and the souls of men.’”

The positive eschatological vision that Revelation presents is also crucial, however. A unifying theme in Montcheuil’s clandestine writings is that resistance will ultimately destroy itself if based on nothing more than the hatred of enemies. Truly moral action demands the love of justice. In a later issue of *Cahiers* he declared:

We do not have the right to tolerate injustice of which others are victims when we can correct it. Not to fight against it is to become complicit in it. . . . Justice is indivisible, and not to will that its reign be established in every domain is to sacrifice it everywhere. The duty imposes itself on all humanity, but it would be particularly inexcusable for Christians to divest themselves of it.²⁵

Montcheuil here expressed, in terms derived from his study of Malebranche, the priority of justice in the ordering of a world concretely founded on love. It is the love of God that unifies the divided soul and enables the soul to act on the world that it inhabits, whereas sin fragments the soul. Compromise with any sinful element of social or personal life, therefore, brings with it a refusal of the responsibility presented by the possibility of true, faithful action. The soul’s externally directed force, by which it acts on the world and shapes it, originates in divine action and depends on the continued unifying action of divine love.²⁶

Christian faith thus consists in the combination of the contemplative and

²³ John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (London: SCM, 2005) 3. For background, see André Laudouze, *Dominicains français et Action française, 1899–1940: Maurras au couvent* (Paris: Éditions ouvrières, 1990).

²⁴ Yves de Montcheuil, “Perspectives,” *Courrier français du témoignage chrétien* 9 (April 1944) 384–86.

²⁵ Yves de Montcheuil, “Vers le soulèvement de la nation,” *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien* 26–27 (May 1944) 311.

²⁶ Yves de Montcheuil, “The Use of Force,” in *GS* 38–42; also “La loi d’amour,” in *MT* 353–61.

active lives. Contemplation provides an impulse into ever more active spiritual engagement with the world, in the *in actione contemplativus* tradition of Ignatius's disciple Jerome Nadal. Contemplation neither precedes nor succeeds action, but accompanies it.²⁷ Montcheuil stated in his essay "Temporal Action":

The Christian can neither be a "mystic" who isolates himself in a temporal and solitary anticipation of the Union with God . . . nor an "activist" who lives only for the increase of brotherly relationships in the world and who attributes all the worth of religion to the fact that it makes these relationships possible by the light of its doctrine and by the aid of its fervor. The Christian should combine a religious life lived for itself and directed toward eternity with a temporal activity required by the religious life in itself.²⁸

Montcheuil's most robust embrace of the active life is expressed in his controversial essay "Nietzsche and the Critique of the Christian Ideal."²⁹ This paper was suppressed by the editors in charge of Catholic publishing in Paris, a fact to which de Lubac drew attention in his letter of April 25, 1941, to his superiors, protesting their failure to support action against Nazism and the Vichy regime.³⁰ The paper was then allowed to appear in the June 25, 1941, issue of *Cité nouvelle*, the substitute journal for *Études* in the southern zone; the article initiated a series of studies that, de Lubac noted, established a more explicitly political agenda for the journal (*MT* 364). Montcheuil focused his argument on Nietzsche's critique of the value system he associated with Christian religion. Nietzsche complained that Christian morality required conformity to a particular moral code and the privileging of passivity above action. The most profound words of the Evangelists are, Nietzsche protested, not to resist evil: "The incapacity for resistance here becomes morality."³¹ Christian morality is, according to this interpretation and echoing Scheler's analysis, one of "resentment," being a reaction against the morality of the noble soul constructed by pagan religion (*MT* 168).

De Lubac was also immersed in Nietzsche at this time, publishing the following January in *Cité nouvelle* his own essay, "Nietzsche et Kierke-

²⁷ Jérôme Nadal, *Contemplatif dans l'action: Écrits spirituels ignatiens (1535–1575)* (Paris: Desclée, 1994) 19–21.

²⁸ Yves de Montcheuil, "Temporal action," *MA* 141; originally published as "Vie chrétienne et action temporelle," *Construire [Études]* 12 (1943) 94–116.

²⁹ *MT* 159–85; originally published in *Cité nouvelle: Revue catholique d'étude et d'action* 12 (June 25, 1941) 1153–87.

³⁰ Henri de Lubac, "Letter to My Superiors," in *Theology in History* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996) 433.

³¹ *MA* 170; see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* no. 29, in *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, intro. Michael Tanner (London: Penguin, 1990) 153.

gaard,” which would contribute to his *Affrontements mystiques* and eventually *Drama of Atheist Humanism*.³² The chronological sequence suggests that de Lubac’s interest here was inspired by Montcheuil’s.

Montcheuil accepted many elements of the Nietzschean analysis of what Christian morality can in practice become. He disputed, however, Nietzsche’s presumption that the essence of Christian morality is found in the failures of Christian moral practice and teaching. On the contrary, he argued, all moral systems are rendered provisional by divine grace. He concurred with Nietzsche’s affirmation of the moral dignity of the freely acting soul: “The soul is not noble because it performs acts conforming to an ideal of nobility. Acts are noble because they emanate from a noble soul: they lose their value if they are copied from outside, supposing that this is possible” (*MT* 166). Montcheuil further acknowledged, approvingly, Nietzsche’s admiration for Revelation on the grounds that the book is motivated by a new understanding of Christian love as a positive force of strength and judgment.³³ This close connection between love, justice, and eschatology is exactly what Montcheuil himself wished to establish.

Having appropriated elements of Nietzschean philosophy for his own use, Montcheuil acknowledged the fundamental incompatibility of Nietzschean and Christian teaching. It would be naïve to suppose that Nietzsche’s protests could be shorn of their aggressive excesses and transformed into a new genre of Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, “with all doctrines which, while wholly rejecting Christian dogma, retain Christian values, a partial agreement is possible in the domain of practice, when it is a matter of results in which commonly accepted values are expressed” (*MT* 181). Montcheuil described the theological relevance of these particular secular doctrines:

Nietzsche makes us attentive to a falsification that cannot be described simply as possible, but that we are continually realizing, and against which we must always fight: the justification and canonization of our weaknesses and our cowardice under the mask of virtues that carry a Christian name. . . . Grace, which we promise on behalf of Christ to the discouraged, is not an aid that would spare them from any part of the work and allow him to fulfill his own task more comfortably: it is what acts to promote a greater effort. It gives, but it is first an effort that it gives. Such is its divine paradox. (*MT* 183)

³² Henri de Lubac, “Nietzsche et Kierkegaard,” *Cité nouvelle: Revue catholique d’étude et d’action* 1 (January 1942) 1–25; *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995) 469–509. See Stephen Schloesser, “Against Forgetting: Memory, History, Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006) 275–319, at 310–11.

³³ *MA* 171–72; see Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*, ed. Kieth Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe, essay 1, no. 16 (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University, 1994) 35.

Progress in the moral life brings a person closer to God's revelation (*MA* 159), with no other more explicitly religious motive or awareness possible.

In his 1941 essay "God and the moral life," Montcheuil described formation in the moral life in terms of the development of a moral sense, which he defined as an immediate and direct intuition of moral values that does not depend on external tradition or reasoning (*MT* 146). He thus wished to demonstrate how Christians do not rely solely on church teaching for ethical guidance. Moreover, recourse to church teaching is by implication insufficient to mitigate acts of omission. Humanity, in cultivating its moral sense, opens itself to the grace of God in Christ, and the moral life itself becomes an expression of faith (*MT* 157).

A standard objection to this position is that it undermines a necessary contrast between religious commitment and moral action. Montcheuil vigorously defended his high valuation of the moral life against such critiques, however, arguing that moral life is infused with the grace of God and needs to be transformed by that grace. Clear similarities can be seen here to the earlier argument about the materialism of the Scholastic opponents of atheist Communists: both arguments rest on the notion of an unmediated separation of the spiritual and natural orders.

Most moral decisions, Montcheuil reasoned, are nonetheless determined in practice by the oppositional "pure nature" conception of moral reasoning inherent in obligation, rather than by the moral sense, and are experienced as a movement of will against inclination, or of duty against personal pleasure. Nothing is wrong with this practical deontology, because obligation is the first moral fact to strike humanity and command its attention. Indeed, deontology captures the notions fundamental to moral reasoning that moral principles originate beyond nature and that nature must therefore conform to them, rather than they to nature. The sense of obligation, however, fails to illumine the ultimate principle on which morality rests (*MT* 152). The belief that obligation is the primary motivating factor in the moral life is therefore mistaken. Experience of morality as obligation suggests that the moral law is set against the self but is nevertheless lived by the self and continually created by divine grace. The most important practical effect of this teaching is that the Christian experiences a moral call to perform supererogatory acts that far exceed in their demands any negative moral requirements *not* to act in particular ways (*MT* 356).

Montcheuil here demonstrated his awareness of Bergson's doctrine of the two sources of morality and religion: a morality of movement founded on a positive desire to participate in collective spiritual action, which Bergson favored, against a static morality that ultimately undermines human life and creativity (*MT* 141, 199). Yet, contra Bergson, the natural movement of the soul by the moral sense is an initiative of divine grace. Only grace will enable humanity to attain its final end and the supreme values of

communion with God, loving possession of God, and participation in divine life (*MA* 136). Because human existence is both temporal and eternal, the image of communion with God enjoyed in current temporal life (*MA* 139) will finally be replaced by the likeness of fully realized communion for which humanity strives (e.g., *AC* 164, 171). Humanity is called to seek, “in the temporal and in part through the temporal, an end that will only be reached beyond the temporal; of pursuing in and through work on oneself, on others, and on the world, an end that will not be attained by work but rather thanks to an intervention from on high, an end that nevertheless cannot be obtained if this work is scorned” (*AC* 166).

CHURCH, STATE, AND THE KINGDOM

Totalitarian state persecution presented classic Catholic political theology with a tremendous challenge. Political questions facing the French Church had typically concerned the right of the Church to independent existence and intervention in the temporal realm in the face of a strong nation-state.³⁴ Indeed, as already discussed, Montcheuil had received his Jesuit formation in Jersey and Canterbury rather than in France due precisely to the Third Republic’s expulsion of the religious teaching orders from the country. This antagonism between church and state was quite different from the German situation, in which dialectical theology emerged as a response to an excessively close relationship between church and state in the far younger Prussian state: a Hegelian synthesis of church with state and theology with philosophy, leading, in the Catholic case, to the 1933 concordat severely limiting ecclesial independence.³⁵

German churches had not, however, experienced ongoing persecution as did the Church in France. The French Church had been occupied with attempts to defend its independent existence in the civil sphere, such as in education, since the Revolution. Two recent initiatives of Pope Pius XI (1922–1939) provided the church–state debate in France with fresh impetus. The 1924 encyclical, *Maximam gravissimamque*, had gone some way toward accommodating the Church to the church–state relation that existed in France following the 1905 law of separation and the 1920 restoration of diplomatic relations, by accepting the creation of diocesan associations, provided that these operated in conformity with canon law. The 1929 Lateran Treaty, enacted between the Vatican and Italy, clarified the political status of the Holy See, following the formation of the Italian state in

³⁴ Yves de Montcheuil, “Church and State,” in *GS* 58–64, provides an outline of these debates.

³⁵ For the concordat, see *The Persecution of the Catholic Church in the Third Reich: Facts and Documents* (London: Burns & Oates, 1940) 516–22.

1870 and the resurgence of Italian nationalism under Benito Mussolini, by establishing the Vatican as an independent and neutral city-state.

The responsibility of Christians to defend basic human dignity and natural rights against the state had not, in contrast, assumed much prominence in Catholic political theology. The understanding of political theology as concerned with the temporal rights of the church vis-à-vis the state could, however, be sustained no longer. Montcheuil considered the Nazi persecution and Vichy complicity in it to be bound up with a crisis in modern society of a fundamentally spiritual character that the Church had primary responsibility to address. In his essay "Problems of the State," Montcheuil reflected on the deep, inner collective life intrinsic to Christian identity. Christian faith is lived in community, and its concept of humanity is fundamentally that of the person, "neither lost in the group nor isolated as an individual, neither the means to an end that is beyond them nor an end to themselves apart from other people" (*GS* 27).

The totalitarian state, Montcheuil argued, is naturally hostile to both the Church and the human person, as it seeks to identify the individual's will with the state's, to eradicate all meaningful private life, and to replace all community association with an isolated individualism of the direct dependence of the individual on the state. An adequate response to Nazism therefore required acceptance by the Church of its political responsibility to intervene in the events taking place in a way that did not compromise but preferably restated its specifically spiritual witness in society. Not to fight against injustice would imply complicity in it. To consign God to the role of supporting a social religion of obedience to those in authority would be "moral treason." God can never be assigned the utilitarian function of being a guarantor of temporal power (*MT* 143–4), but places that power under judgment.

In his essay "The Church and the Temporal Order" Montcheuil refused any suggestion that the Church should be able to undertake spiritual witness by gaining control of the details of state policy, or that the temporal authority of the state is delegated to it by the Church. The state receives its power from God, not from the Church, and is rightly assigned responsibility for providing humanity with the temporal conditions needed to enable it to pursue its supernatural end (*AC* 175–6). Nevertheless, in later essays Montcheuil continued to oppose a quietist spirituality, arguing for the surrender of a "social quietism" of faith focused on the inner life of the soul. The themes of justice, order, and love from his work on Malebranche are again apparent, where he stated unequivocally:

The wish for personal sanctification, if it is to fulfil all that is demanded of it, requires not only an inner struggle against personal faults and, in social relationships, an effort of individual charity for those with whom Providence has placed us in contact, but also a fight against all the injustices, all the distorted institutions that

are opposed on the human plane to the communion of persons and that give rise to isolation, envy, hatred. There is no enlightened sanctification without attention not only to our individual relationships with our neighbor, but also to the state of the social relationships and the institutions that express them. (*MA* 142)

In general, love can never become a substitute for justice (*GS* 19). The defense of justice is, Montcheuil argued, the duty of all people, and especially of all Christians, and will not be assisted by ecclesial control of the political realm.

The Vichy regime certainly treated the Church with greater respect than had the Third Republic, and many members of the hierarchy were therefore slow to criticize it; thus, many clergy were discredited in the eyes of increasing numbers of the faithful.³⁶ Arguably, the best policy that the bishops could constructively adopt in public was one of realism, seeking to safeguard the Church's basic functions of prayer and sacramental worship, with occasional more outspoken witness, if this was not likely to lead to serious reprisals that would undermine essential activities.³⁷ Despite his own activism, Montcheuil did not criticize the bishops for alleged inaction. In the absence of contrary evidence, it is reasonable to suppose his view of the matter to have been close to that of de Lubac, who in 1938 argued that frequent criticisms of the policies of the hierarchy, especially those of Cardinal Pierre-Marie Gerlier of Lyons, imply a "lack of retrospective imagination, an astonishing ignorance of the circumstances and real possibilities" from "historians who have a tendency to set themselves up as examining judges without managing to reconstruct the atmosphere of the period."³⁸ De Lubac highlighted Gerlier's successful opposition to the *service du travail obligatoire*, rebuttal of Vichy attempts to reach a concordat with the Holy See, personal support of key figures in left-wing organizations, close relations with the leaders of Jewish consistories, ecumenical collaboration with Pastor Marc Boegner, diocesan speeches, personal interventions to Marshall Pétain, and death threats from collaborationist sections of the press, in sections of which his historic honorific designation was distorted to "Primate of De Gaulle."

Montcheuil realized that social witness needed to be a primarily lay initiative and the shared vocation of all Christians, and not regarded as

³⁶ See Gérard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire, *Religion et société en France, 1914–1945* (Toulouse: Privat, 2002) 244–52.

³⁷ See Jacques Duquesne, *Les Catholiques français sous l'occupation* (Paris: Grasset, 1966) 167–91.

³⁸ Henri de Lubac, "Concerning Cardinal Gerlier," in *Christian Resistance to Anti-Semitism: Memories from 1940–1944* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990) 165–88, at 179, 185.

solely clergy business.³⁹ The mobilization of lay Christians in any case became a prominent feature of political theology in France, led by Montcheuil and other intellectuals in religious orders, who, Julian Jackson recognizes, formed the “greatest source of Catholic dissent towards Vichy.”⁴⁰ Montcheuil was one of a group of French theologians whose ecclesiology was influenced by Johann Adam Moehler (1796–1838). In an essay on Moehler, he drew a clear distinction between the unity of the Church, and the uniformity of its outward forms, suggesting that unity, which the Church should be pursuing, does not require uniformity. What unity does require, however, is an identity of interior inspiration.⁴¹ This inspiration would be given to the Church in the current situation by its work for justice. Providing that inspiration is present, there is no danger that greater lay initiative in the Church will, in strengthening its witness, undermine its order.

In the opening page of *Aspects of the Church*, Montcheuil urged Christians to look on the Church “with the eyes of faith.” This notion, originating in Pierre Rousselot’s controversial eponymous article, suggested that, for there to be a true expression of faith, participation in church practices and other outward forms of assent needed to be accompanied by an inward “psychological” assent to those practices and forms. Church teaching could not command the immediate assent of Christians simply by virtue of its own internal and quasi-legal claims to be authoritative.⁴² With striking imagery probably derived from an informally circulated copy of Teilhard de Chardin’s *The Divine Milieu*, Montcheuil described how the individual believer looks on the world and acts on it: the human soul burning with fire (MA 12), the milieu as a divine mystery present in the world (MA 19–25), and the duty of transforming the milieu by means of action, which is both a human initiative and a divine call (MA 29–31).⁴³ Later in the same work,

³⁹ MA 21–24, 154–57, 162. For Montcheuil’s wider theology of lay vocation, see his excellent chapter “The Catholic Concept of Vocation,” MA 47–66.

⁴⁰ Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940–1944* (New York: Oxford University, 2003) 270.

⁴¹ Yves de Montcheuil, “La liberté et la diversité dans l’unité,” in *L’Église et une: Hommage à Moehler*, ed. Pierre Chaillet (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1939) 234–54.

⁴² Rousselot’s original article is reproduced in *The Eyes of Faith; Answer to Two Attacks*, trans. Joseph Donceel, intro. John M. McDermott; trans. and intro. Avery Dulles (New York: Fordham University, 1990) 19–82. The “act of faith” doctrine had been banned within the Society of Jesus as recently as 1920 by a ruling following upon an assessment by an international committee of theologians appointed by the superior general. See Avery Dulles, “Principal Theses of the Position of Pierre Rousselot,” in *ibid.* 113. Here is a good example of how the imperative of witness combined with the impossibility of systematic theological regulation in the wartime situation encouraged creative theological development.

⁴³ Montcheuil and Teilhard had met in Paris in the summer of 1928, shortly after

he quotes from Teilhard's 1930 essay "The Human Phenomenon": "The greatest danger which humanity may fear is not some exterior catastrophe, famine or plague . . . but rather that spiritual sickness (the most terrible because it is the most directly antihuman of all scourges), the loss of appetite for living" (*MA* 111).⁴⁴ This "appetite for living" is a love of life born of a desire to realize love for God in the most concrete way possible by recognizing that God continues to reveal in the created order a "perpetual transformation of the temporal" (*MA* 140).

Montcheuil stated that "the Christian has already entered the eternal at the same time [as] they continue to live in the temporal" (*MA* 144; also *GS* 4). He developed this eschatology most fully in retreats given for the École de Sèvres at a *camp de rentrée* at Solemnes during the first half of October 1943 and pursued the theme at a teachers' gathering during Lent 1944. These essays form part of Montcheuil's final theological testimony before his death in August 1944. The kingdom of God possesses, he argued, absolute value for the Christian, and can be obtained only by the renunciation of all other kingdoms. Referring to Karl Barth, Montcheuil asserted that the message of the kingdom is a *crisis*: a moment of absolute choice that shatters absolutely all human values and expectations (*RE* 43). This message might be assumed to compel active intervention in the temporal order so that it becomes modeled more closely on the values of the kingdom, such as unity and peace. On the contrary, in a crucial chapter "The Kingdom and the Temporal Order" (*RE* 83–92), Montcheuil identified different imperatives of the kingdom and, as in his critique of Malebranche, he warned against assimilating the kingdom to any temporal reality:

Entry into the kingdom is a new birth. It is the source of a life which is superior to a well-organized natural life, a life which belongs to a different, supernatural order. It is the principle of a prayer which has no other end but itself, which corresponds with the soul's need to be present to God even as God is present to it. When one has understood this, one can see that the spiritual life is irreducible to the social life. . . . To confuse the coming of the Kingdom with the establishment of a better

Teilhard's return from China, where he had produced the manuscript. See Teilhard's letters of September 29, 1928, and November 22, 1936, in *Lettres intimes à Auguste Valensin, Bruno de Solages, Henri de Lubac, André Ravier, 1919–1955*, ed. and intro. Henri de Lubac (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1972) 178, 322. For affinities, see especially Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, trans. Siôn Cowell (Brighton: Sussex Academic, 2004) 74–112; and on the themes themselves, see David Grumett, *Teilhard de Chardin: Theology, Humanity, and Cosmos* (Dudley, Mass.: Peeters, 2005) 139–68.

⁴⁴ *MA* 111; in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Vision of the Past*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Collins, 1966) 171.

social order is to ignore totally the originality and the value of the Kingdom. (*RE* 85–86)⁴⁵

The eschatological character of Christian claims requires that the substance and end of the kingdom transcend material life, even though they commence on earth. The inauguration of the kingdom on earth occurs in mystery and not according to any objective prescription for society or politics. Nazi ideology refused to recognize precisely this fact. Montcheuil's argument was not, in other words, only with the particular form of society and government that Nazism attempted to create, but with any religious or quasi-religious attempt to establish such a society. The establishment of a perfect social order is, he said, impossible (*RE* 91). The genuine kingdom is born within the Christian heart so intimately and so deeply that no visible entity can be counted as evidence of its coming (*RE* 99). In *Leçons sur le Christ*, delivered to a group of teachers and students at the Centre Universitaire Catholique early in 1944, Montcheuil clearly identified the kingdom as the possession of Christ, with its coming on earth being a future eschatological event that is nevertheless anticipated in the world as currently constituted whenever injustice is transformed:

In this broken world, no complicity with injustice can be accepted—even though it demands refusal of the world—because the union realized at the price of injustice can only engender graver disunity; on the other hand, it must ask of God the transformation of injustice, so that one day he can unite the world with him in the love of Christ. This applies to both individual and collective relations. There is no effective union with God by Christ without this aspiration to union of the sons of God in their reclaimed innocence. (*LC* 121; also *GS* 13)

This work of promoting justice becomes the work of Christ when the person who undertakes it lives in the new principle of love for God that Christ brought into the world.

SACRIFICE

In a letter written as the Vichy regime was installing itself in power, Montcheuil had speculated: “Maybe we will now have the opportunity to learn what it means to risk everything to ensure the liberty of the Word of God. When that moment comes, we will prove that all the things we were saying before the war were not merely the idle chatter of people who enjoy comfort and safety.”⁴⁶ He expressed a sense of impending crisis, both collective and personal, in which fundamental spiritual values would be

⁴⁵ Quoted in Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984) 109; see *MA* 58–59.

⁴⁶ Yves de Montcheuil, letter of July 3, 1940, quoted in de Lubac, *Three Jesuits* 59.

challenged and the commitment of Christians to the defence of those values tested to the limit (*AC* 170). With Nazi control over France progressively increasing, Montcheuil on several occasions reflected on the nature of sacrifice. He thus returned to Blondelian themes, focusing on the concepts of purification and passivity: sacrifice is superior to egoism, and the suffering of which sacrifice is the exemplary part cannot be understood merely as the voluntary restraint of action.⁴⁷ Suffering is, in contrast, “a real metaphysical experiment. He who has had the courage to sacrifice his egoism and pride in order to remain faithful to the demands [*exigences*] of the truth to the extent that he perceives it, finds in the overcoming of life that results the best guarantee that he has not lied to himself, the certitude that he is not living an illusion” (*PR* 31–32). In another essay, Montcheuil described in greater detail the active and purifying function of suffering:

Evil, being at the root of our activity, is not curable by that activity itself. It is therefore vain to expect evil to correct itself: it is necessary to call for its purification. Clearly this is not to deny the value and necessity of ascetic practice. Personal effort is needed, but it is effective only to the extent that it originates in a will that is already purified. If it does not, we can only ever correct a fault with another fault. Saint John of the Cross has illustrated this fundamental truth well, that all true purification is passive, and that in so far as the purification must reach down to the lowest depths of the soul, it assumes a new form of passivity: the night of the senses must be succeeded by the night of the spirit. This teaching is not, as often imagined, a subtle truth applicable only to a few “extraordinary” states of the mystical life: it expresses profoundly the elementary law of all Christian life.

To suffer is to undergo a purifying passivity. Suffering is thus the only instrument of our purification, the means by which we do not avoid a diminution of egoism in the self and the engendering of love. That love is acquired only by the Cross, that it is an illusion to hope to see it produced in the self by any other means, is the affirmation over which Christian asceticism will never compromise. There is a royal way of the Cross. There is no “short way”; nor will there ever be one. . . . Each soul has its cup to drink. If it defers the moment when it takes a sip, it also defers the moment when it begins to love more. To progress toward pain and grief is to progress toward life. It is to plunge oneself into the only purifying crucible that is able to turn us into saints. Suffering is no second-best, no unfortunate accident which arrives to complicate things and add a burden. It is the *way*.⁴⁸

Suffering brings the human soul to a deeper spiritual witness than does happiness, and becomes a requirement of justice. Montcheuil, by identifying suffering as participation in the cross of Christ, the source of justice and

⁴⁷ *PR* 49, 55. For Blondel’s enthusiastic reception of the work, see his letters to Henri de Lubac of December 19, 1946, and March 10, 1948, in de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church* 378, 320–21.

⁴⁸ Yves de Montcheuil, “La loi d’amour,” in *MT* 360–61; originally in *Cité nouvelle: Revue catholique d’étude et d’action* (June 10, 1942) 1052–63; also *MA* 115.

truth, pursued to its logical conclusion his critique of Malebranche's equation of happiness with justice (*MA* 32, 52, 102). His description of "purifying passivity," moreover, echoed Blondel's statement to Teilhard de Chardin, remarking with Saint John of the Cross that "abnegation alone . . . enjoys, possesses, and knows everything through a decentering and transfer of the self over to God."⁴⁹

The immediate circumstances surrounding Montcheuil's capture and execution were as follows.⁵⁰ In July 1944, he was contacted by an acquaintance who had attended some of his lectures, and who had expressed to him concerns that bishops were not appointing chaplains to the maquis (underground resistance movements) in the southeast of the country. This absence of chaplains was depriving the movements' lay members of the sacraments and pastoral ministry. Montcheuil had already established links with some of these members, however, having taken part in holidays and youth camps in the southeast during the summer of 1943 and Easter 1944. Realizing that he was well placed to assess the situation, he planned a visit to the Vercors area of about one week's duration, after which he would return to Paris and submit his findings to church authorities. His visit coincided, however, with an assault on the resistance group based in the area launched on July 27 by Nazi parachutists. Montcheuil and many others took refuge in a large, well-hidden cave being used as a secret hospital; they believed they had evaded detection once the parachutists had passed in front of the cave without searching it. But several hours later they returned, found the resisters, separated out Montcheuil and several others to transport to Grenoble for questioning, and executed the rest. During questioning, Montcheuil stated truthfully that he was not a member of the resistance group but was conducting a pastoral visit. He was shot by firing squad on August 10, just ten days before the town's liberation by the Allies.

The chain of events culminating in Montcheuil's death could be regarded as a chance series of unfortunate incidents common in times of conflict. A dutiful teacher and pastor, Montcheuil had framed no specific intention to give up his life in the struggle against Nazism. Fouilloux considers this interpretation of his death, but then offers a quite different one: "It is also, in a certain way, the logical culmination of an intellectual and spiritual engagement contracted at the beginning of the 1920s. When action, in the

⁴⁹ Maurice Blondel, letter of December 5, 1919, in *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin—Maurice Blondel: Correspondence* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967) 26.

⁵⁰ First-hand accounts are provided in Juliette Lesage, "La Grotte de la Luire," and Pierre Tanant, "La Père du Montcheuil et le chef militaire du Vercors," in *Spiritualité, théologie, et résistance: Yves de Montcheuil, théologien au maquis du Vercors*, ed. Pierre Bolle and Jean Godel (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires, 1987) 246–50. See also de Lubac, *Three Jesuits* 30–31; and Fouilloux, *Montcheuil* 37.

Blondelian sense of the term, is founded on the human conscience in search of God, it is unsurprising that it is prepared to continue right up to the end of its undertaking under exceptional circumstances.”⁵¹ Montcheuil followed the previous great French Jesuit theologian of love, Pierre Rousselot, to an early death in war.⁵² Rousselot served as an officer in the French army and was killed in battle at Épargnes in 1915. In his critique of Scheler, Montcheuil quoted Léonce de Grandmaison’s comment about Rousselot that “the best religious are those who sacrifice and not those who ignore the great attachments of nature.”⁵³ It becomes increasingly apparent in Montcheuil’s theology that he was preparing himself spiritually to pursue whatever paths of action the divine imperatives of justice and the kingdom presented to him, even death.

CONCLUSION

Montcheuil repeated approvingly the assessment of his friend and colleague Henri de Lubac about one of the causes of totalitarian rule: “Rationalism expelled mystery: myth has taken its place.”⁵⁴ He reasserted that at the heart of religion are love, action, and eschatology, which render futile all attempts to interpret the person and human society in purely natural terms. The supernatural must, Montcheuil affirmed, be allowed to penetrate the whole of temporal life, being the “result of a possession, of a transformed infusion of the divine in us” (*MA* 35; also *MA* 135, *GS* 55). In other words, the source of religion is not to be found within preexisting nature, but has its source beyond nature, acting on nature to transform, renew, and redeem it.

In Montcheuil’s oeuvre can be seen the political relevance and origins of key themes in modern theology, especially lay ecclesiology and the supernatural. His works constitute, moreover, a significant antecedent to post-war liberation theology, being an early instance of the appropriation of Blondel’s philosophy of action to justify the overtly political implications of Christian faith in a time of crisis.⁵⁵ Montcheuil has been identified as a

⁵¹ Foullioux, *Montcheuil* 45.

⁵² Pierre Rousselot, *Pour l’histoire du problème de l’amour au Moyen-Âge*, Extrait des Beitrage zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters 6 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1908); trans. and intro. Alan Vincelette with Pol Vandavelde as *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2001).

⁵³ *MT* 216; see Léonce de Grandmaison, biographical foreword to Pierre Rousselot, *L’Intellectualisme de saint Thomas*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1924) vii.

⁵⁴ *GS* 27; Henri de Lubac, “Christian Explanation of Our Times,” in *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash, foreword Michel Sales (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996) 444.

⁵⁵ Liberation theology is not derived in all its forms from Marxist theory. Jürgen

chaplain of the maquis when in fact he was an accidental martyr, captured during a single visit to the maquis that was motivated by specifically spiritual and pastoral concerns. He did not seek to become an activist, but was a figure for whom spiritual concerns became political ones because the context in which faith was located had shifted.

De Lubac reflects on the role that Montcheuil “might have played, within the Church and for her influence, in the troubled period after the war (and again after the Council).”⁵⁶ Montcheuil had conceived his theological writing as part of a wider project to synthesize the Augustinian and Thomist traditions by means of a doctrine of love, and to use this synthesis, in engagement with modern authors, as the foundation for an exposition of the entire Christian mystery.⁵⁷ He had not begun work on this larger study at the time of his death. What he did bequeath, however, was a lived testimony of love proven in the sacrificial pursuit of justice for the sake of the Church and, above all else, for the kingdom of Christ.

Moltmann, for instance, recognizes that liberation theology possesses its “own theological dynamic” that appropriates Blondel’s philosophical theology of action (*Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl [London: SCM, 2000] 238).

⁵⁶ De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church* 98.

⁵⁷ Henri de Lubac, foreword to *MQ* 5.