

GIDE AND THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS<sup>1</sup>

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**M**OST of you will have seen, several years ago, André Labarthe's film entitled *La Vie commence demain*, a film which speculated in quite a fascinating way on the future of the human race by seeing it through the eyes of certain great Frenchmen. A perhaps excessively ingenuous young man, played by Jean-Pierre Aumont, puts questions to them, and their answers and what they are doing when he visits them reveal the way the world is supposed to be developing. The biological future is represented by some rather grisly experiments with a young calf in a rubber bath, carried out by Jean Rostand; the architectural future by Le Corbusier and his city of the sun; the future of the fine arts by Picasso sketching or making one of his plates complete with *basso-rilievo* knife, fork and sausages. One of these plates sent as a present *via* the ingenuous young man is the introduction to the next personage, who is demonstrating one of the possibilities of human speech in the future by handling a tape-recorder. To show the virtues of the instrument, its owner—this is, of course, André Gide—switches it on, and we hear his voice coming from it. And as it speaks, and develops a brief theme—what theme it is, matters very little—Gide's face broadens with pleasure, with enormous satisfaction.

This is the image which inevitably presents itself to my mind whenever I think of Gide, and not just Gide as a person but Gide as an artist: the individual listening to himself and being immensely gratified by what he hears. The individual spinning off another self from his original self, and then holding converse with it, holding views, perhaps, opposed to those of the original, and yet being at one and the same time part and parcel of that original. Like the M. Teste of Paul Valéry, Gide is the peronification of the symbolist narcissus, seeing himself, seeing the self that sees, and so *ad infinitum*: 'je suis étant, et me voyant; me voyant me voir, et ainsi de suite'. But with Gide the figure of Narcissus is not a mere literary decoration. He *is* Narcissus, in love with his own image; and even when he puts his finger into the pool and

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breaks the surface, he is in love with whatever form his person becomes.

Some of the results of this are evident at once in his art. It presumably requires a temperament of this kind to publish one's detailed and intimate diary in the course of one's lifetime—or at least it did a lifetime ago, even if one reserved the key for an almost posthumous publication. There is also the further implication that the novelist as Narcissus will be a weaker artist than the pure observer of others, and Gide was aware of this, of the danger of art as a simple prolongation of the self: in the *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* he quotes from Thibaudet: 'Il est rare qu'un auteur qui s'expose dans un roman, fasse de lui un individu ressemblant, je veux dire vivant. . . . Le romancier authentique crée ses personnages avec les directions infinies de sa vie possible; le romancier factice les crée avec la ligne unique de sa vie réelle. Le génie du roman fait vivre le possible; il ne fait pas revivre le réel.' Gide's purpose as an artist seems to be to make his own personal reality live again; it is this, rather than a multiplicity of possible *other* lives which interests him. Not only art, but morality is involved here too. Gide—though no doubt little read at the moment—is among the foremost moralists of modern French literature, and it is interesting to see how this complacent dwelling on the varieties of the self affects his moral outlook and his art, if not simultaneously, at least in close relation one with the other.

The most conspicuous thing about Gide as a moralist is his hostility to Christian morality. Brought up against a rigidly strict Protestant background, his soul fought for in the pages of all the best reviews and by some of the ablest Catholic writers of this century, Gide dickered with Christianity, or rather the remnants of it, for many years before making a final break just after the first world war. There had been many preliminary breaks, of which the most important was the trip to North Africa late in 1893, which revealed to him a sensuality that had been previously fairly well concealed. From this revelation springs the book *Les Nourritures terrestres*, a paean of praise for a country that broke a disease in him—he was supposed to be suffering from tuberculosis before he left France—and which also gave him a new morality. New, that is, to himself; for in fact it is a very old-fashioned one, and has a later literary counterpart in the early work of Albert Camus: the glorification of the immediacy of the

senses, the banishment of ideas, the total surrender of the person to the demands of the body—‘Il ne me suffit pas de lire’, writes Gide, ‘que les sables des plages sont doux; je veux que mes pieds nus le sentent. . . . Toute connaissance que n’a pas précédé une sensation m’est inutile. . . . J’ai porté hardiment ma main sur chaque chose et me suis cru des droits sur chaque objet de mes désirs.’

*Les Nourritures terrestres* is like this for much of its length—a prolonged lyrical effusion on Gide’s discovery of his own body. But then the self-seeing self takes a hand. He looks at this lyrical self, and builds up a fiction around it, recounts not simply a sequence of enthusiasms, but a series of events in which these have occurred to the hero of a novel. This is the origin of *L’Immoraliste*. The central figure of this novel is a young man called Michel, brought up in a bookish atmosphere, a scholar who has lived by the intellect alone and been almost completely unaware of his senses. He marries his cousin—as Gide himself did—but without at the time having any love for her. His father had expressed on his deathbed a wish that they should marry, and Michel assumed it was imperative to carry out this deathbed promise. They spend their honeymoon in Africa, where Michel has a haemoptysis and is nursed back to life by Marceline. He had thought little about the value of life before. Now he grasps it with both hands and, physically renewed, wishes to taste the life of the senses he had previously ignored. This manifests itself in various ways: in homosexual approaches to Arab children, and later in the book to a Sicilian coachman; in a course of university lectures designed to attack the overcivilization of Roman culture and to glorify the barbarity of the Goths; and in the taking over of some property in Normandy which he not only begins to run himself but, attracted by the animal self-sufficiency of the peasants on his land, joins with them on secret poaching expeditions in his own woods. The theoretical side of this liberation from past constraints is provided by Ménalque, a rather feeble parody of Oscar Wilde, who hints that the domestic stability which Michel is achieving, on the surface at any rate, by settling down in France, will ruin him. Restless, Michel takes the opportunity provided by the sickness of his wife to leave the Normandy farm and travel again. Her sickness develops like his own. It is tuberculosis, and to cure it he takes her first to Switzerland, from there to Italy and, compelled by the memory of his own cure, back to North Africa

where she dies, in rather too dramatic circumstances. Michel, who had been sitting in her bedroom with her, is tempted away by the desire to wander round the streets of the Arab town, meets a youth he had been attracted by on his previous visit, and goes with him to what is, in effect, a brothel; it is on his return from this that he finds his wife covered in her own blood. The contrast is too neatly contrived, almost novelette-ish.

Is anything changed in the hedonism of *Les Nourritures terrestres* by its reappearance in the form of a fiction? Gide, by a rather clumsy introductory device, has Michel recount the story of his marriage and his search for a different sort of happiness in the form of a confession to friends: 'je dois me prouver à moi-même', he says to them, 'que je n'ai pas outrepassé mon droit'. And he refers to his liberation after his wife's death, and his responsibility for that death, as a kind of 'crime'. This is, I think, the sum of the difference between *Les Nourritures terrestres* and *L'Immoraliste*: in the latter book, a concern for the other person is at least felt occasionally, even though it is to all intents and purposes rejected. Towards the end of the former book he had written: 'AUTRUI—importance de sa vie: lui parler'. The importance of the life of anyone other than oneself is not very evident yet; but in *L'Immoraliste*, as Michel and his wife are on the deck of the ship which takes them to Tunis, he watches her and realizes for the first time her *separateness* from him, her value in herself: 'Ainsi donc, celle à qui j'attachais ma vie avait sa vie propre et réelle! L'importance de cette pensée m'éveilla plusieurs fois cette nuit; plusieurs fois je me dressai sur ma couchette pour voir, sur l'autre couchette plus bas, Marceline, ma femme, dormir.' It is this kind of consideration which prevents one making too facile an identification of Gide with his chief characters. Michel represents really a retreat from the Gide of *Les Nourritures*, for whom in any case the statement that pleasure was a synonym for happiness and even for being itself, represented a fixation of an attitude which in real life he had already passed beyond. This is why he affirms in his preface to a re-issue of *Les Nourritures*: 'J'écrivais ce livre au moment où, par le mariage, je venais de fixer ma vie; où j'aliénais volontairement une liberté que mon livre, oeuvre d'art, revendiquait d'autant plus. Et j'étais en l'écrivant, il va sans dire, parfaitement sincère; mais sincère également dans le démenti de mon coeur.' By a positive action he had channelled

off his *real* life into a path quite different from that prescribed, apparently, by the books he had written; and even the extremism of the second book is attenuated by the fact that it is written in the form of a confession, finishes in a request for enlightenment, and considers not simply the existence of the other person, of *Autrui*, as just an additional flavour in one's own world, but as a being independent of oneself, and to whom one bears a relationship of justice.

*L'Immoraliste* does not of course take us much beyond the momentary awareness of this fact. For most of the book Michel does use Marceline as an object rather than as a person. The change which overcomes his own life is so tremendous in its impact upon him that there is little room for her, and when he seeks a new life of the senses it will be apart from her and not with her. *She* is sacrificed for *him* in order that he may regain his perfect liberty, even though at the end of the book he is not quite certain how to use it. And although the Gide who writes may not be the Gide who is reflected, *at that moment*, in the writing, his last piece of autobiography (*Et nunc manet in te*) shows that the feeling of doubt over the abuse of another's rights with which Michel finishes his confession, is paralleled by that of Gide before his wife: 'Je garde ce remords', he writes, 'd'avoir faussé sa destinée'—because his own inclinations forced them into a marriage which held no hope of real union or of maternity for her.

The reverse of the medallion is shown to us in *La Porte étroite*. *L'Immoraliste* has a hedonist as its hero. Alissa, the heroine of *La Porte étroite*, is on the other hand a model of self-sacrifice. Beloved by Jérôme, whom her younger sister Juliette also loves, she renounces him to make way for Juliette. Juliette herself, not to be outdone in sacrifice, marries someone she does not like, in order that the way may be clear for her elder sister. Jérôme and Alissa are separated for some time by his military service, and although a correspondence keeps them in touch, there is a curious restraint about their meeting on his return. Finally Alissa confesses to him that she loves him still, but at a distance. His presence makes her silent and awkward. In a letter explaining this to him after he leaves, she says, in words almost exactly like those used by Gide's wife to him and which he transposed as Alissa's:

'Je suis rentrée, désespérée, t'écrire . . . que je ne voulais plus t'écrire . . . une lettre d'adieu . . . parce qu'enfin je sentais trop

que notre correspondance tout entière n'était qu'un grand mirage, que chacun de nous n'écrivait, hélas! qu'à soi-même et que. . . Jérôme! Jérôme! ah! que nous restions toujours éloignés!

'Oh! je ne t'aime pas moins, mon ami! au contraire je n'ai jamais si bien senti, à mon trouble même, à ma gêne dès que tu t'approchais de moi, combien profondément je t'aimais; mais désespérément, vois-tu, car, il faut bien me l'avouer: de loin je t'aimais davantage. Déjà je m'en doutais, hélas! Cette rencontre tant souhaitée achève de m'en instruire, et c'est de quoi, toi aussi, mon ami, il importe de te convaincre. Adieu mon frère tant aimé; que Dieu te garde et te dirige; de Lui seul on peut impunément s'approcher.'

A final attempt to see Alissa and take up again the promise of marriage brings forth, to Jérôme's question, 'Que peut préférer l'âme au bonheur?', Alissa's answer, 'La sainteté'. She writes to him again that the very adequacy of the happiness they feel together is a threat to the other happiness they are born for—*Hic incipit amor Dei!* Sanctity is an obligation, says Alissa, to which he also is bound. Marriage would prevent its achievement simply because of the happiness marriage would bring. Therefore they must never marry. So she makes herself plain, dresses badly, gets rid of the piano they played, the books they read together, in an attempt to put him out of her mind. After one or two meetings in which Jérôme tries to persuade her to forget this ideal which transcends their love, she leaves her Normandy home and finally dies alone in a nursing-home in Paris, bequeathing to Jérôme the diary in which she had recorded both her passionate love for him and her struggle to go beyond it.

It is by this ending that we cannot fail to see that Gide has not been writing, as we might at first have thought, a piece of Christian morality. All that we are shown ultimately in *La Porte étroite* is the final futility of the sacrifice. The reader is left wondering at the pointlessness of Alissa's renunciation, and asking who is the better in the end for the sacrifices that have taken place—not Jérôme, not really Juliette whose *mariage de convenance* is shown to be a screen which even after many years cannot conceal her love for Jérôme, nor Alissa herself. At first sight the book seems like a classical treatment of the Christian theme of sacrifice for the love of God—but only on the surface. When we probe

beneath that, it is clear that Gide is trying to show us that the love of God, as preached by the Christian religion, leads to a warping and twisting of the personality. And he implies something more. The case of 'intérêt', of self-interest, is quite clear in the Michel of *L'Immoraliste*. But, Gide would have us believe, it is also clear in the case of Alissa, whose pursuit of an ascetic ideal to attain to the divine is seen to be simply another form of self-interest. However much we renounce, we are still bound to the self we are, we still seek its welfare. Alissa, writing to God in her diary 'et si mon âme aujourd'hui sanglote de le perdre, n'est-ce pas pour que, plus tard, en Vous je le retrouve?' reveals to us that in spite of her saying 'ce n'est pas la récompense future vers quoi s'efforce notre vertu', the *amour-vertu* of Alissa has a canker at its heart almost as much as that of any purely worldly love.

'A puritanical education', says one of the characters in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, 'engenders in all who free themselves from it the hatred of all that is called virtue.' Virtue is decried in *L'Immoraliste*, and its motivation sapped in *La Porte étroite*. Gide, finding the exercise of his homosexuality incompatible with the practice of the Christian religion, is not content with declaring his opposition, and remaining a rebel against the established order. Instead he tries to substitute his own morality for the one he has rejected or bypassed. So in *Corydon*, his rather naïve treatise on homosexuality, he endeavours to make out a case, not for the tolerance of the homosexual by the exercise of charity, which would be salutary and straightforward enough, but to establish the homosexual as a superior being to the heterosexual, and as corresponding more to the norm of nature, to the ambiguities of sex he discovers in the animal world, to the supposed prevalence of homosexuality among men of genius, etc. Nor is he content simply to rest there. Again and again he comes back to Christian moral concepts, and even when he rejects them, he tries nevertheless to use them, to accommodate them to himself. This is the purpose of the 'green notebook', the diary he kept over a number of years during the first world war and which was later published in the title, taken from one of its scriptural epigraphs, *Numquid et tu?* 'Art thou not also a Galilean?' and 'Are you also led astray?'—questions which Gide feels addressed, across the centuries, to himself.

The purpose of *Numquid et tu?* is disarmingly simple. Christi-

anity—like Russian communism later in Gide's life—has lost the evangelical note. The Church, by the mere fact of being an institution, has falsified Christ's message. This message we can find again for ourselves by going to the scriptures, and he makes clear in a preface written in 1926 (ten years after the diary was set down) that the result of such a search will make one not a Catholic, not a Protestant, but a Christian, simply . . . 'je ne suis pas converti', he writes of himself, 'je ne suis ni protestant ni catholique, je suis chrétien, tout simplement'. Yet, knowing that his Catholic friends Jammes, Du Bos, and Claudel will read the booklet, he adds: 'J'avais eu soin, relisant le cahier d'où les pages de *Numquid et tu?* furent extraites, de n'en laisser paraître aucune que le catholique le plus orthodoxe ne pût, il me semble, approuver'. And indeed, one of the main themes, the presence of eternal life here and now, and not as a thing to come, was greeted rapturously by Claudel: 'Votre grande découverte qui est parfaitement exacte, c'est que la vie éternelle n'est pas remise à plus tard, c'est qu'elle commence dès maintenant, à l'instant même, que le Royaume de Dieu est avec nous, *intra nos*'. But this was not the only theme of *Numquid et tu?* It was to sweep away from the Gospel, from the 'petit livre tout simple', all that centuries of commentary and interpretation had laid over it, and to separate the message of Christ from the harshness of the legislator St Paul.

'Pour moi, étant autrefois sans loi, je vivais; mais le commandement vint, le péché reprit vie, et je mourus.' (Rom. vii. 9.) This is the text he chooses first to dwell on. For Grace to come to us, the Law must be known to us, and so sin, says Gide: 'Cette phrase s'illumine et se gonfle malgré S. Paul d'une signification redoutable.' Why *redoutable*? Because apparently it can be used to justify man's sin and man's helplessness in the face of sin. This is why, he adds, the Epistle to the Romans is so confused; St Paul is trying to convey a brand-new truth, that the Law leads to Grace, to extricate the tender newly born Christianity from the harshness of the semitic law which envelops it. There is here a curious inconsistency in Gide's thought. At the beginning of *Numquid et tu?* he makes it clear that he thinks St Paul is hostile to Jewish teaching, that his task is to clear it away in order to clarify the love in Christianity. But later he says pretty much the opposite, that the love in the New Testament is in the words of Christ alone, and



that St Paul is simply a lawyer obscuring his message. And yet Gide quotes Christ as saying (John ix, 41) 'If you were blind, you should not have sin; but now you say, we see. Your sin remaineth.' A clear vision, full knowledge—without this there is no sin. But Gide knows that *intérêt* can often provide a convenient blindness for us. Is this why he is so eager to seek out texts which argue for a tolerance of unpopular customs?

'Tel croit pouvoir manger de tout; tel autre, qui est faible, ne mange que des légumes. Que celui qui mange ne méprise point celui qui ne mange pas, et que celui qui ne mange pas ne méprise point celui qui mange, car Dieu l'a accueilli.' (Rom. xiv, 1-3.) Gide, pleased by this show of tolerance in one he considers lacking in precisely that quality, adds: 'Et pourquoi ne pousser la citation plus loin?', giving the next verse—'Qui es-tu, toi qui juges un serviteur d'autrui? S'il se tient debout ou s'il tombe, cela regarde son maître. Mais il se tiendra debout, car le Seigneur a le pouvoir de l'affermir.' How commanding this passage is, cries Gide, how swift and sharp the rebuke to the intolerant! 'Ce chapitre XIV de l'épître aux Romains est du reste péremptoire tout entier. On lit un peu plus loin ceci: "Je sais et je suis persuadé par le Seigneur Jésus que rien n'est impur en soi et qu'une chose n'est impure que pour celui qui la croit impure."' St Paul is simply saying, of course, that if someone comes to Christianity and is still inclined to regard as unclean the foods prohibited by the Mosaic law, he is to be humoured, because his past habits of thought have in fact made such food unclean for him.

Yes, the passage is about food, writes Gide, but then why should it not have two or three additional meanings, as other texts do? 'Il ne s'agit pas ici d'ergoter; la signification de cette parole est large et profonde: la restriction ne doit pas être dictée par la loi, mais par l'amour; et saint Paul la formule aussitôt après: "Mais si, pour un aliment, ton frère est attristé, tu ne marches plus selon l'amour."' This leads abruptly to a sudden switch, totally unexpected, on the part of the commentator: ' "Ne cause pas, par ton aliment, la perte de celui pour qui le Christ est mort." Ceci entre en moi comme un glaive. Quoi, pour un peu de plaisir, vais-je nier la mort et la miséricorde du Christ? Pour un aliment (he repeats and underlines) ne détruis pas l'oeuvre de Dieu. Le royaume de Dieu, ce n'est pas le manger et le boire, mais la justice, la paix et la joie, par la Saint-Esprit.'

Gide is of course bound to find a stumbling-block—whatever he wishes to permit himself, his conscience, however formed, however inherited, however much he may wish to be rid of it, speaks against him—‘Heureux celui qui ne se condamne pas lui-même dans ce qu’il approuve.’ It is the awareness of this which makes him rebel against the scriptures even as he reads. Later in the text he remarks that Christ has given us liberty—and then the other Gide breaks in: what is the good of this if we cannot use it, if we are in fact bound by the law?

In theory there need be no end to the sequence of pious acceptance, rebellion, shrewd criticism and pathetic logic-chopping, which makes up the substance of *Numquid et tu?* What brings it to a stop is something deep within Gide himself when the fact that he has been trying to alter Christ’s message to suit his own purposes is borne in him, and the realization silences him. ‘Plus rien écrit dans ce carnet depuis quinze jours. Abandonné mes lectures, et ces pieux exercices que mon coeur, complètement sec et distrait, n’approuvait plus. N’y plus voir aussitôt que comédie, et comédie malhonnête. . . .’ Three weeks later he adds, ‘Période d’indifférence, de sécheresse et d’indignité. . . . Je ne sais plus ni crier ni même écouter Dieu. S’il me parle peut-être, je n’entends pas. Me voici redevenu complètement indifférent à sa voix. . . .’ Why has this transformation occurred? Part of the reason is no doubt Gide’s awareness that he has been mishandling the Gospel. But there is another reason. St Paul is continually concealing from him the message of Christ: ‘Ce n’est jamais au Christ, c’est à saint Paul que je me heurte,—et c’est en lui, jamais en l’Evangile, que je retrouve tout ce qui m’avait écarté.’ The secret of the Gospels is joy. If we do not experience joy we nullify the passion of Christ, and we ignore his gift of himself, if we say we wish to carry his cross of suffering, because he has already done that for us once and for all: ‘Joie. Joie. Je sais que le secret de votre Evangile, Seigneur, tient tout dans ce mot divin: Joie. . . . Tout chrétien qui ne parvient pas à la joie rend la passion du Christ inutile, et par cela même l’aggrave. Vouloir porter la croix du Christ, souhaiter d’épouser ses souffrances, n’est-ce pas méconnaître son don?’

Apart from the last phrase, it would be possible to read a perfectly acceptable Christian teaching into this passage. But what does it mean for Gide? The meaning of joy for him is not a wide

one, nor a very subtle one, as he recognizes himself. It is the joy of the flesh, as a short dialogue with God shows us:

‘Seigneur! . . . votre main, pour la saisir, je voudrais être moins indigne. Ma fange ainsi la tachera plutôt que ne me blanchira Sa lumière. . . .

—Tu sais bien. . . .

—Pardon, Seigneur! oui, je sais que je mens. Le vrai c’est que, cette chair que je hais, je l’aime encore plus que Vous-même. Je meurs de n’en épuiser pas son attrait. Je vous demande de m’aider, mais c’est sans renoncement véritable.’

The very fact that at this point in *Numquid et tu?* he can bear to use a dialogue shows that the immediacy of the emotion is on the retreat. At a distance from it, he can *view* it; can he make art from it? Can he write the ‘comedy’ hinted at, in other terms? ‘Si du moins je pouvais raconter ce drame, peindre Satan après qu’il a pris possession d’un être, se servant de lui, agissant par lui sur autrui.’ *La Symphonie pastorale* is his attempt to do this—an idyll to begin with, as its title suggests, a tragedy at the end. A charitable Protestant clergyman finds a helpless blind girl without friends on the death of her aunt in an isolated village of the Jura. He brings her home with him, cares for her, performs the most menial tasks for her, and slowly trains her in the ways of life and goodness in the teeth of the open hostility of his wife and family. He falls in love with the girl, Gertrude, without admitting this to himself; he tries to find out ways to cure her blindness, only to find, when she returns from hospital with her sight, that the image of a lover she had constructed in her mind was of his son Jacques and not of himself. Revolted by his father’s spiritual blindness in not seeing he was falling in love, and by his father’s attempts to use the scriptures to cover his own sin and conceal it from the girl, the son leaves his father and becomes a Catholic. The girl, appalled by what her sight has revealed to her, attempts to commit suicide, fails, but dies shortly afterwards.

The theme of blindness, disappearing from the girl physically as it overwhelms the pastor spiritually, explains in part the use of the diary form. As with the diary of Alissa, as with the confession of Michel, the first person form takes us gradually into an acceptance of the motives of the pastor and a dislike of those who are hostile to him until, at a point in the narrative which will vary with the reader’s subtlety, we realize that the pastor is not

what he claims to be at all and is in fact a kind of monster of self-deception. The diary form also parallels, of course, the form of *Numquid et tu?*

Why does this parallel matter? Because in the pastor Gide has depicted, not himself, but an aspect, a moment of himself, a moment of genuine aspiration followed by one of falsehood, seized upon and observed. This is seen quite clearly in the fact that the pastor, reading the Bible aloud to Gertrude, omits those parts he thinks will distress her or show her that the world is not the place of brightness and joy he is trying to make her believe in. 'Il me reproche', he says of his son, 'de choisir dans la doctrine chrétienne "ce qui me plaît"'. Mais je ne choisis pas telle ou telle parole du Christ. Simplement, entre le Christ et saint Paul, je choisis le Christ. Par crainte d'avoir à les opposer, lui se refuse de dissocier l'un de l'autre, se refuse à sentir de l'un à l'autre une différence d'inspiration, et proteste si je lui dis qu'ici j'écoute un homme tandis que là j'entends Dieu. . . . Plus il raisonne, plus il me persuade de ceci: qu'il n'est point sensible à l'accent uniquement divin de la moindre parole du Christ.'

Why should there be an opposition between Christ and St Paul? Because, says the pastor (and Gide repeats this many years later in *Les Nouvelles Nourritures*), in Christ's words there are no commands, no threats, nothing is forbidden: 'Je cherche à travers l'Evangile, je cherche en vain commandement, menace, défense. . . . Tout cela n'est que de saint Paul.' Here of course the subtlety of the text breaks down. The blindness is not only wilful, but in such a person as a Protestant pastor it is not plausible.

More plausible, though too neatly contrived, is the blindness-ignorance theme as it is introduced consciously by the pastor: 'Le parfait bonheur de Gertrude, qui rayonne de tout son être, vient de ce qu'elle ne connaît point le péché.' It is to preserve this perfect happiness that, as a symbol of Gide's own selectivity in *Numquid et tu?*, he gives her just those scriptures chosen by himself: 'Je me refuse à lui donner les épîtres de Paul, car si, aveugle, elle ne connaît point le péché, que sert de l'inquiéter en la laissant lire: "Le péché a pris de nouvelles forces par le commandement" (Rom. vii, 13), et toute la dialectique qui suit, si admirable soit-elle?' This gives us a shrewd idea of how Gide himself has conceived of the relationship between knowledge of the law and sin. There is no question of seeing the law as St

Paul intended us to see it, as 'revealing' sin and helping us to grace by instructing us about sin and its avoidance; Gide takes St Paul to mean that Law generates sin, and that innocence depends on ignorance.

The relationship with *Numquid et tu?* is brought out even more clearly by the too blatant irony of the entry for the 10th May in the pastor's diary. He records an argument he had had with his son, and concludes as follows on the spirit he thinks moves Jacques: 'N'est-ce pas La Rochefoucauld qui disait que l'esprit est souvent la dupe du coeur?' (The very fact that this aphorism gives him no pause is an indication of Gide's desire for too neat a contrast, spoiling the acceptability of the narrative at this point.) 'Il va sans dire que je n'osai le faire remarquer à Jacques aussitôt, connaissant son humeur et le tenant pour un de ceux que la discussion ne fait qu'obstiner dans son sens.' And he relates how he left a note for his son, bearing the very words Gide himself had noted down in *Numquid et tu?* from Romans xiv, 2, 'Que celui qui ne mange pas ne juge pas celui qui mange, car Dieu a accueilli ce dernier', and he goes on as Gide did, 'J'aurais bien pu copier la suite: Je sais et je suis persuadé par le Seigneur Jésus que rien n'est impur en soi et qu'une chose n'est impure que pour celui qui la croit impure.' This is completed by a reflection to himself which serves to underline his spiritual blindness: '. . . mais je n'ai pas osé, craignant que Jacques n'allât supposer, en mon esprit, à l'égard de Gertrude, quelque interprétation injurieuse, qui ne doit même pas effleurer son esprit.' The pastor's downfall is accomplished by his ultimate discovery of his own self-deception, and with this the realization that his wife has known all along what was happening to him when he merely thought she had been lacking in charity towards Gertrude, that his son had been observing him and knowing him better than he knew himself, and lastly that Gertrude herself has discovered how his attitude towards her had altered. She, symbolically, reads those parts of the Bible he had hidden from her, and with the restoration of her sight comes knowledge of the fullness of the law, and knowledge of sin into her life. She quotes a passage (yet again, one used by Gide in *Numquid et tu?*): 'Pour moi, étant autrefois sans loi, je vivais; mais quand le commandement vint, le péché reprit vie, et je mourus.' The pastor is finally left, as he writes himself, with his heart 'more arid than the desert'. Like Gide, the pastor

had put to himself the question, 'Est-ce trahir le Christ, est-ce diminuer, profaner l'Évangile que d'y voir surtout une *méthode pour arriver à la vie bienheureuse*?' The answer is in both cases, paradoxically enough, that diminution and profanation of the Gospel does seem to take place.

One must make a reservation here about the net impact of *La Symphonie pastorale*. It is—and knowing Gide we would expect this—ambivalent in its approach to the pastor's problem. Gide wants to show us what fools sincere Christians can be when they try to press-gang the scriptures into the service of their own desires, conscious or otherwise; but as D. L. Thomas has pointed out in his book *André Gide, The Ethic of the Artist*, 'the plausibility and insidiousness of the case made for instinct, deepen the impression that the mainspring of the work is not the idea of the wrongness of the pastor's conduct but its rightness, and that the tragic ending is after all a sophisticated retreat, a contrived issue from the central doctrine of the work, the doctrine that Christ's essential teaching—the doctrine of love unadulterated by moral prohibitions—justifies any aberration from right feeling.' That is putting the case perhaps too strongly. But the way the film was made from this book suggests that to make out a case for the pastor is not very difficult, and that unless we see him first through his own eyes by the use of the diary form and secondly as a reflection of the use of scriptural texts in *Numquid et tu?*, the book might seem more ambivalent than it really is.

The tragic ending, too, may represent, like the death of Marceline, and that of Alissa, a 'sophisticated retreat'; it may on the other hand simply be a rapid way of cutting short the narrative, because Gide seems to want to bring his actions to a close once the interest—for him—has been achieved by the elaborating of the problem. But one of his motives in writing *does* seem, as the friend in *L'Immoraliste* says of Michel, to make us acquiesce, to make us accomplices of his action, and the wish to prove a moral point which this entails does seem occasionally to make him oversimplify his structures. So in *L'Immoraliste* we have the rather crude symbolic parallel of the two retraced routes through Europe and Africa, the first from sickness to life, the second from sickness to death; so also in *La Symphonie pastorale* the symbol of decreasing physical blindness paralleled by increasing spiritual blindness. The symbolic armature shows through, because Gide

is a moralist first and a novelist second—perhaps the best example in recent French literature of Lawrence's 'Art for *my* sake'. *La Symphonie pastorale* seems to be one of the rare occasions when the protean moralist makes a choice (for some of the time at any rate). As Charles du Bos points out in that attractive mixture of French and English he occasionally uses in his diary: 'It is always the same thing with Gide, what I studied dans mon ancien Journal sur Pascal celui du 9 juin 1922, you cannot have it both ways; and of course tout Gide est fondé sur le principe not only that you can, but almost that your duty is to have it both ways; mais dans ce domaine-là la position n'est pas tenable.' *La Symphonie pastorale* is surely an indication that Gide himself was aware his position was not tenable, that the attempt adumbrated in *Numquid et tu?* was bound to misfire, and that it was honest, if reprehensible, to come down firmly on the other side of the fence.

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### NOTICE

This year there will be a certain re-organization and augmentation of the University of London Extensions Courses of lectures given by Dominican Fathers in London. Two courses will be held in the Aquinas Centre, namely, 'The Old Testament' (the first part of the course for the Diploma in Biblical and Religious Studies) by Sebastian Bullough, O.P., and 'Reason and the Nature of God', by Thomas Gilby, O.P.; and a third series on 'Philosophy and the Human Soul' will be given by Thomas Gilby, O.P., in the Livingstone Hall, Broadway, S.W.1. For further details of these, readers are referred to the Aquinas Centre advertisement in this number of BLACKFRIARS, or invited to write to the Father Warden, O.P., Aquinas Centre, St Dominic's Priory, London, N.W.5.