



RICE UNIVERSITY

CHARLES PÉGUY: PERPETUAL INFIDEL

by

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ABSTRACT

CHARLES PÉGUY: PERPETUAL INFIDEL

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Charles Péguy was a highly individualistic thinker. So personally tailor-made were many of his ideas that even his friends and supporters found him difficult to follow intellectually. However, Péguy's eccentricities were to a great extent shaped and colored by the political and social upheaval of his nation. This thesis attempts both to elucidate the uniqueness of this man and to use him as a window into fin de siècle France. Four major areas are analyzed in order to present this portrait of Péguy as a touchstone for his times: his socialism, his involvement in the Dreyfus Affair, his journalistic effort in the Cahiers de la Quinzaine, and his attitude towards French nationalism.

Péguy's socialism certainly attracted no adherents and founded no movement. His utopian outlook was engendered by a disenchantment with the turmoil of French parliamentary politics, and produced in Péguy a sense of urgency shared by many of his countrymen.

Péguy, the poet, is particularly important to the

historian dealing with the Dreyfus Affair. Only a poet could articulate the transcendent qualities the fate of a lone army captain came to represent for the French Republic. Dreyfusism marked Péguy's life as surely as it changed the French body politic.

Péguy's newspaper, the Cahiers de la Quinzaine, gave concrete expression to many of his ideas. In addition, the Cahiers brought together the writings of many discordant thinkers, resulting in what was truly a potpourri of diverse elements of French intellectual life.

Even in his distorted patriotism, Péguy reflected the stance of many Frenchmen. His hatred of positivism, his distrust of intellectuals, and his fear for French security combined in a call for heroic action which found a ready response in the youth of France.

As a socialist, Dreyfusist, fin de siècle writer, and militant chauvinist Péguy, despite his idiosyncracies, truly lived the various phases of the history of his own time.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This space is a personal island, traditionally reserved for the author's compelling need to thank, however inadequately, those who have aided him. I now know both this need and the inadequacy of words. I wish to thank the members of my thesis committee, Dr. John C. Barker and Dr. Martin J. Weiner, for their time and helpful suggestions. A very special debt is owed Dr. R. John Rath, chairman of my committee, whose guidance and support have been a constant source of encouragement. My mother and father, Colonel and Mrs. C. P. Derrick, gave as always the patience, understanding, and love only parents possess. Joy and Ethel Ware endured unforgettable trips west and truly deserve to be called pioneers. I can only hope Jane knows what she meant this year.

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"The life of an honest man must be an apostasy and a perpetual desertion. The honest man must be a perpetual renegade, the life of an honest man must be a perpetual infidelity. For the man who wishes to remain faithful to truth must make himself continually unfaithful to all the continual, successive, indefatigable, renascent errors."

De la Situation

"For twenty years I have been walking alone.  
It agrees with me."

Un nouveau théologien,  
M. Fernand Laudet

## INTRODUCTION

If, as a recent chronicler of French intellectual history in the nineteenth century has remarked, "it is difficult to take Péguy seriously as a thinker,"<sup>1</sup> then it is legitimate to question the value of a historical study of the man and his work. Certainly Charles Péguy did not create any unified philosophical outlook. Nor did his political opinions remain necessarily consistent. Their cogency is even lost, for the most part, when considered in the abstract, apart from the events which triggered them. His young disciple, André Suares, accurately described his writing: "His books always begin and never end; . . . to be on course, for him, is to drift."<sup>2</sup> Still, the literary merits and style of this copious writer need not deter the historian. His worth is there and lies both in the nature of the man himself and his times.

Born January 7, 1873, Péguy grew up with the Third Republic which assumed control of France in the wake of

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<sup>1</sup>Koenraad W. Swart, The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century France (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), p. 209.

<sup>2</sup>André Suares, Péguy (Paris: Émile-Paul frères, 1915), p. 39.

its devastating defeat by Prussia in 1870. It was an uneasy nation that it ruled. In the ensuing years this troubled regime faced economic dislocations. Opponents on both extremes of the political spectrum capitalized on a series of government scandals, such as the thoroughly mishandled construction of the Panama Canal. Surrounding these ever-present difficulties was the intent of the humiliated nation on revenge against the ancient German foe.

At the base of these disruptions was the failure of France to define its national consciousness. Debate flashed incessantly between permanent and ephemeral political groups over what should be the nature of the republic and whether it should, in fact, even be a republic. Forced to ward off challenges to its legitimacy from the left in the Paris Commune of 1871 and from the right during the Boulanger crisis of 1889, the Third Republic seemingly steered a star-crossed course. It tried merely to retain control, however shaky.

Péguy reflected in his own outlook the troubled soul of his nation. He was disappointed in his own historical time, feeling that his generation was a "rear-guard" movement, deprived of opportunities for heroic action.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Charles Péguy, "Notre Jeunesse," in Oeuvres en prose, 1909-1914 (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1957), p. 505.



Péguy summed up his sense of deprivation in his division of history. "There are epochs and there are periods. We are living in a period."<sup>4</sup> For this earnest young provincial, a period constituted a historical time span lacking ideals and a sense of purpose. During his entire life Péguy sought a cause, a faith, and a mission to relieve his sense of personal loss and to restore France to moral and political health.

He partially found a cure in the ancient heritage of France and in his own peasant origins. Raised by his mother and grandmother after the early death of his father, the boy was surrounded by reminiscences and vestiges of an earlier France. His grandmother could neither read nor write and worked at her task of mending chairs, dressed in the same costume as her forbears who had tended the vines of Genetines. From her stories and influence, Péguy felt at one with the past ages of France. His peasant stock seemed to give him a view of a stable world before it was wracked by economic and political strife. He never lost his admiration for the common laborer performing his simple task well. There was never any shame felt for his peasant blood; he spoke of his "ancestors as would an aristocrat"--with pride and deference.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 511. The italics appear in the original.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Péguy, "Pierre, commencement d'une vie bourgeoise," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1959), pp. 1217-1247; René Doumic, "Charles Péguy," Revue des Deux Mondes (October 15, 1914), p. 477.

Péguy's birth place, Orléans, gave France her greatest heroine, Jeanne d'Arc. The girl-warrior was the subject of much of Péguy's work as well as the inspiration of his life. As Jeanne had carried her spiritual message onto the battlefield, Péguy felt compelled to commit his literature to contemporary events. There is none of the isolation of the pure artist about him. Action was for this poet the method for saving his times from complete destitution. He could only speak in generalities when they were first rooted in a specific issue. Péguy was a participant, and what is most important for the historian, a conscious and literate one. As he expressed it, "The worst of partialities is to withhold oneself, the worst ignorance is not to act, the worst lie is to steal away."<sup>6</sup>

It was in the midst of a battle, the Dreyfus Affair, that Péguy inaugurated his journal, the Cahiers de la Quinzaine in 1900. From the small office of the editor, he waged his onslaughts on the positivism of the intellectuals, parliamentary socialism, and the anti-Dreyfusists. From here, he defended Bergson, propagated his own brand of nationalism, and presented a forum for

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<sup>6</sup> Maurice David, Initiation à Charles Péguy (Paris: La Nouvelle Édition, 1945), pp. 21-22; Maxwell Adereth, Commitment in Modern French Literature: Politics and Society in Péguy, Aragon, and Sartre (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 15; Suarès, Péguy, pp. 49-50; Charles Péguy, Basic Verities: Prose and Poetry, translated by Ann and Julian Green (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1945), p. 53.

many leading authors. The idealism of Romain Rolland, as well as the anarchism of Georges Sorel, is to be found within the pages of the Cahiers. To read them is to peer through a window into fin de siècle France.

Rigid consistency and elaborate structuring of ideas lose their appeal in the feast that the Cahiers presents. Swart, the chronicler of nineteenth century France, answers the question of Péguy's value for us when he writes, "A friend of Romain Rolland, a disciple of Bergson, an ardent republican in spite of nationalist and Catholic views, he more than any other writer of his time represented the new France facing the German menace."<sup>7</sup> In his myriad views and in the individuality of those views, Péguy is a guide and touchstone for his times.

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<sup>7</sup>Swart, The Sense of Decadence, p. 208.

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## CHAPTER I

### PÉGUY'S SOCIALISM: THE MORAL REVOLUTION

"The social revolution will be moral, or it will not be."  
--Notre Jeunesse

In the last years of his life Charles Péguy returned to the Catholic faith and wrote the moving religious poetry on which his literary fame rests. On first glance this may seem surprising in a man whose previous work had proclaimed his atheism, had dealt with specific political issues, and had included attacks on the Church and the clericals. Fundamentally, however, there is no contradiction. Péguy himself referred to his recovery of faith as an approfondissement, a deepening, rather than an evolution in his thinking.<sup>1</sup>

To grasp Péguy's unique concept of socialism, it is necessary to keep constantly in mind that this man took an essentially poetic and religious stance toward life. Even his prose carries the mark of the poet. According to Charly Guyot, "to separate, in Péguy, the poet from the writer of prose is . . . to commit an error in method."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Péguy, Lettres et entretiens, edited by Marcel Péguy (Paris: Editions de Paris, 1954), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup>Charly Guyot, Péguy pamphlétaire (Neuchâtel, Suisse: Les Éditions de la Baconnière, 1950), pp. 14-15. Alexander Dru concurs in this opinion. See his Péguy (London: The Harvill Press, 1956).

Péguy had never really been a materialist. He retained a religious outlook even when he no longer believed in the faith of his childhood. He spoke of coming to socialism as a "conversion," and by that he applied to a secular creed all that the word connotes in a theological sense.<sup>3</sup>

Péguy's own conversion to socialism came during his student days at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, although his thinking was already attuned to such a decision by earlier influences. As a child he had listened attentively to the tales of the Franco-Prussian War from Louis Boitier, an old blacksmith of Orléans, who no doubt substituted for the father taken by the war. As he grew older Péguy received more from Boitier than the recounting of military exploits. The old republican introduced the adolescent to the need to battle society's internal evils as he had fought once to preserve the nation from an external foe. "In the forge of Boitier blew the wind of justice."<sup>4</sup> Boitier was the center of a socialist study group in the small town. Although he served as a guide to the socialist movement for Péguy, he drew no maps and chartered no course. His allegiance was to no faction

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Péguy, "Encore de la grippe," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 144; Charles Péguy, "Pour ma maison," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 1255.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Secrétain, Péguy, soldat de la liberté (New York: Bretano's, 1941), p. 57.

and his conception of unity was of nation rather than class.<sup>5</sup> Péguy must have adopted this view of socialism, for he spoke of Boitier as his "ancien maître."<sup>6</sup>

If Boitier were the master of the youthful philosophy, Lucien Herr certainly structured the thinking of the mature Péguy. Herr holds a rather anomalous position in the history of French socialism. In his youth a brilliant future had been forecast for him. However, when the librarianship of the École Normale Supérieure became available, he applied for it. Despite the post's meager stipend and its past status as a stepping-stone to more advantageous jobs, Herr intended to devote his entire life to the school and its library. The École Normale's directors were more than happy to hire a man with such devotion. Rarely emerging from the stacks, Herr nevertheless exerted a tremendous influence on the development of the Socialist Party in France. He never held a party office of importance nor served in the Republic. However, he used his contact with the students to proselytize for socialism. His converts were many and some were illustrious. Herr is credited with shaping the thought of

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<sup>5</sup>Hans Schmitt, Charles Péguy: The Decline of an Idealist (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Péguy, "Clio, dialogue de l'histoire et de l'âme païenne," in Oeuvres en prose, 1909-1914, p. 193.

Jules Jaures and Georges Clemenceau to a great extent.<sup>7</sup> Péguy was one of the young normaliens who felt the pervasive influence of this unusual steward of books and youthful idealism, and he never forgot or regretted his relationship with Lucien Herr. When bitterness had eroded other friendships and when a marked coolness had even invaded the rapport between Herr and Péguy, the debt was still acknowledged. As Péguy wrote:

I will not conceal the great and often profound effect that M. Herr made on me when I finally knew him at school. His complete impartiality, his capacity for enormous amounts of work, his great anonymous toil, his total and universal learning, and above all his brutal frankness gave me a deep and faithful affection for him. In a sense, I was truly his son. He sometimes taught me how one works and often how one acts. He provided a great deal of frank and correct information on an entire world that I was ignoring--the literary, scientific and political world.<sup>8</sup>

In view of his obvious delight with Herr's companionship, it is surprising that Péguy abruptly left the École Normale in 1895 on the pretext of failing eyesight to return to Orléans. He had only been at the school one year and had tried the qualifying examination three times before finally being admitted. However, he considered the reason for his departure a pressing one; Péguy took the leave to complete his first literary work. The subject of the work already in progress had remained a

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<sup>7</sup>Marjorie Villiers, Charles Péguy, A Study in Integrity (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 65; Schmitt, Charles Péguy, p. 70; Jérôme Tharaud and Jean Tharaud, Notre cher Péguy (Geneve, Suisse: Le Palatine, 1926), pp. 66-67.

<sup>8</sup>Péguy, "Pour ma maison," p. 1261.

secret from even his closest schoolmates, for "how would he have dared to say before the great waxed librarians' [Herr's] desk, as shining and respectable as the very soul of Herr, that he, Péguy, an unadulterated anti-clerical and complete socialist, was planning to write a work (and in verse!) glorifying Jeanne d'Arc."<sup>9</sup>

The stupification of his friends was natural, but the contradiction which occasioned it can be reconciled. The dramatic trilogy on which Péguy was working was not to be a historical drama. Given the author's religious attitudes, it certainly could not have been intended as an exposition of Christian doctrine. It was not even truly a drama; with the meditative pauses allowed by the text, it would take an entire day to produce.<sup>10</sup> Jeanne d'Arc was the evocation of the saint's message in relation to contemporary situations. It was the poetic expression of Péguy's concept of socialism.<sup>11</sup> As the life of Jeanne d'Arc represented a quest for eternal salvation, socialism was the pursuit of temporal salvation to Péguy.<sup>12</sup>

The subject of the work was a natural choice, for

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<sup>9</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, pp. 73-74.

<sup>10</sup>Péguy, Basic Verities, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup>Adereth, Commitment in Modern French Literature, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup>Péguy, "Notre Jeunesse," p. 592.



Péguy was the "docile and submissive heir"<sup>13</sup> of all the ages of France. It was not extraordinary that he should pick the greatest of French heroines to embody his conceptions. She was the perfect symbol for the life activated by faith that he wished to communicate.<sup>14</sup>

Hans Schmitt has disagreed with such an interpretation, stating that "to say Jeanne d'Arc was written by a socialist is patently meaningless."<sup>15</sup> This writer disagrees with Schmitt, for she feels that the observant reader can find clues in the play that indicate not only that the author was a socialist, but for what brand of socialism he had opted. The very dedication of the book is one such clue too cogent to be ignored. "To all those women and men who will have lived their lives," Péguy wrote. "To all those women and men who will have died for the establishment of the universal socialist republic, this poem is dedicated."<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Péguy announced his intentions on the first page of Jeanne d'Arc: he wanted to discuss socialist action in the contemporary world. In the opening scene at

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<sup>13</sup>Suarès, Péguy, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup>Jean Onimus, La route de Charles Péguy (Paris: Plon, 1962), p. 24; Eugène van Itterbeek, Socialisme et poésie chez Péguy de "Jeanne d'Arc" à l'Affaire Dreyfus (Paris: L'Amitié Charles Péguy, 1966), pp. 223-224.

<sup>15</sup>Schmitt, Charles Péguy, p. 69.

<sup>16</sup>Charles Péguy, "Jeanne d'Arc," in Oeuvres poétiques complètes (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1954), p. 813.

Domremy, Jeanne's compassion for the suffering of all men was made apparent: "It is true that my soul is in sadness. . . . I have thought of all the unhappy people who have no one to comfort them, and I have thought of all those who do not want to be comforted. I have felt as if I were going to cry."<sup>17</sup> Not only was Jeanne aware of and moved by the presence of the evil around her, but she felt responsible for it. She characterized herself as an "accomplice" in the suffering because of her inactivity. "Vain charities" were the solutions of "cowards." Jeanne's view was contrasted with that of Madame Gervaise, a nun, who no doubt represented the Catholic Church. Jeanne could not accept the facile attitude of the nun who believed that all was God's will and that all one could do was to trust His infinite wisdom and accept.<sup>18</sup>

In the course of the drama "accept" was ultimately what Jeanne had to do. She prayed that the people would be granted a leader to deliver them. She was frightened and troubled when that leader was herself; yet she accepted her commission to intercede. The call to individual action without reservation was depicted with vigor and compassion by a man who was making his own confession and accepting his own obligations.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 816.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 821.

Péguy did not publish Jeanne d'Arc immediately but returned to the École Normale in November, 1896.<sup>19</sup> However, his diligence for scholarship had been diminished in the flush of first authorship. Moreover, Péguy was caught up again in the excitement of Herr's socialist activism. He now used his pen in behalf of the party, and his first article appeared in the Revue Socialiste in February, 1897.<sup>20</sup> The following October the would-be scholar married, using his wife's dowry to open a socialist publishing firm and book store. Putting his academic career in abeyance, Péguy made his work for socialism his chief concern.<sup>21</sup>

If Péguy's studies were no longer primary in his life, he had not relegated the themes discussed in Jeanne d'Arc to the same obscurity. He was intent on expanding and elucidating the means for curing social injustice. In August, 1897, the Revue Socialiste carried Péguy's

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<sup>19</sup> Jeanne d'Arc was not published until December, 1897, at Péguy's expense. It received very little notice and almost all copies were pressed on friends by the eager artist. The work bore the information that it was co-authored by Marcel and Pierre Baudouin. Marcel Baudouin was a very close school friend of Péguy who died in July, 1896. It is not known why Péguy chose to use his middle name and the Baudouin surname or to include Marcel's name, unless it was to show the closeness of their relationship. The work is entirely Péguy's. Péguy married Marcel's sister, Charlotte Baudouin in October, 1897.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Péguy, "Un économiste socialiste, M. Léon Walrus," Revue Socialiste, Vol. XXV (1897), pp. 174-186.

<sup>21</sup> Schmitt, Charles Péguy, pp. 10-11.

article, "De la cité socialiste," describing what all socialists should be working towards. Péguy was quite simplistic in his economic remedies, and the article left to the imagination the practical implementation of his rather commonplace cures. Waste in the economy would be eliminated by suppressing competition and idleness. By centralizing production, he predicted that the citizens would benefit in two ways: a "real" and "living" fraternity, liberty, and justice will reign, and the hegemony of a few powerful individuals will be thwarted.<sup>22</sup> The goal of this scheme was to replace "government of men" by "government of things." Thus, Péguy articulated the belief that evil is due to the maladministration of goods and property.<sup>23</sup>

"De la cité socialiste" was merely the sketch of a more extensive study of the future society. In "Marcel, premier dialogue de la Cité Harmonieuse," Péguy considered in depth the structure of the harmonious city.<sup>24</sup> However, the superficiality of his economic thinking was not removed, and economic theoreticians need look elsewhere for developments in this area of French socialist thought. Péguy cursorily dealt with the division of

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Péguy, "De la cité socialiste," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, pp. 4-7.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> This work was published in June, 1898, again under the joint authorship of Marcel and Pierre Baudouin.

labor and distribution of goods. The citizens will not individually inherit. Material wealth will be owned collectively by the city, which will be its sole trustee. All adult males will do the work of the city, which will be allocated according to talent and necessity.<sup>25</sup>

However, it is unfair to criticize "Marcel" for its niggardly development of ideas which the economist would consider foremost. Péguy did not conceive the work as a contribution to socialist economics but to what W. B. Gallie terms "socialist ethics."<sup>26</sup> The idealistic author of "Marcel" was primarily interested in the opportunities for the citizens of his city to participate in the spiritual and intellectual life of the community. The disharmony that Péguy felt was not located solely in the material structure of contemporary society; he sensed an internal disharmony arising from restrictions on intellectual development.<sup>27</sup> For this reason Péguy derived an extensive amount of leisure time from the sharing of work and goods, and he elaborated on the use of this time.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Péguy, "Marcel, premier dialogue de la Cité Harmonieuse," in Oeuvres complètes (20 vols., Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1916-1955), Vol. X, pp. 102-104 and 125.

<sup>26</sup> W. B. Gallie, "Péguy the Moralist," French Studies, Vol. II (January, 1948), p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> Itterbeck, Socialisme et poésie chez Péguy, p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> Péguy, "Marcel," p. 99.

The leisure time left to the citizens of Péguy's harmonious city will be divided between what he called le travail désintéressé and la vie intérieure.<sup>29</sup> La vie intérieure will be composed of the personal feeling and individual wishes of each inhabitant. Le travail désintéressé will be the intellectual life of the city undertaken when the material well-being of the community has been assured. Thus art, science, and philosophy will constitute le travail désintéressé.<sup>30</sup> These three fields will enjoy complete freedom and will be forced to submit to no authority. There will be no need for competition or rivalry between the artists or savants, because their livelihood has already been assured through the cooperative effort of the citizenry.<sup>31</sup>

The inhabitants of the harmonious city will include all persons of whatever rank, creed or nationality. "No living being is banished from the harmonious city."<sup>32</sup> The doctrine of the Judgment which had first alienated Péguy from the Church was allowed no credence in the composition of his ideal city.<sup>33</sup> Péguy also made it

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 130, 221.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 218, 250.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>33</sup>Gallie, "Péguy the Moralist," p. 71.

perfectly clear that "the city must assure its corporate life by its own methods," for "it receives no supernatural aid."<sup>34</sup> The citizens will have only themselves to blame for whatever wrongs are created by the failure to provide materially for the city. As in Jeanne d'Arc Péguy reiterated his feeling of complicity in the suffering of the world.

Feelings of complicity were not enough, however. Action will be necessary, and it is through the efforts of contemporary men that the ideal city can be realized. However, once the city is brought to realization, its citizens will be incapable of understanding the society whose efforts produced them.<sup>35</sup> Péguy was not just quoting the old adage that virtue goes unrewarded. He believed that moral efforts, if truly effective and sincere, will achieve a situation where they will be no longer needed or even remembered.<sup>36</sup>

On first glance, "Marcel" seems another in a long line of French literary utopias. However, it was more than that--it was an intuition of socialism's, or at least Péguy's idea of socialism's, goals. He did not say that all would be perfection in this society. "I call this city the Harmonious City, not because it will be

<sup>34</sup>Péguy, "Marcel," p. 92.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 170. This theme is reiterated in "De la raison," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 412.

<sup>36</sup>Gallie, "Péguy the Moralizer," p. 76.

completely harmonious, but because it is the most harmonious city we can wish."<sup>37</sup> As its title suggested, "Marcel" was also a dialogue, not just with an imaginary person, but someone who was of a different way of life and thinking than his own. Marcel Baudouin, whose name appeared on the title page, was such a person, and it may be that he was the specific one Péguy had in mind. In this conversation Péguy had attempted to present the moral case for socialism; he had tried to 'sell' it as an entire way of life, not just as an economic change.

Through his writings and his work at the socialist book shop, Péguy was becoming more and more an active participant in the socialist movement. The amazing diversity of French socialist leaders is almost sufficient to discourage any attempt to discover affinities. They included Jules Guesde, the leader of the Marxist wing of the party, as well as Jean Allemane, the former Communard and veteran of the labor movement during Napoleon III's reign, who directed French revisionist thinking. Péguy himself was closest to the independents led by Jules Jaures, a member of the parliament since 1885, when he had become its youngest deputy.<sup>38</sup>

Jaures had captured Péguy's respect while he was at the École Normale. Jaures was often around to discuss

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<sup>37</sup>Péguy, "Marcel," p. 86.

<sup>38</sup>Schmitt, Charles Péguy, p. 70.



issues with Herr. "Péguy assigned him the mission of representing in politics all the ideas which were discussed around the desk of Herr. . . . Jaures would be [the personification of] socialist virtue, courage, strength, generosity, the highest spiritual values appearing in politics where they had never been seen before."<sup>39</sup> Péguy, the lover of saints and heroes, had found one in flesh and blood.

His first contact with the great orator came while Jaures was working in the lockout of the glass-workers at Carmaux in 1895. The owner of the factory, Eugène Ressayguier, had run for election as a deputy and ordered his men to vote for him. Their refusal to meet this demand precipitated his angry avowal to destroy their union. Ressayguier tried to goad the workers into a strike to provide him with an excuse, but Jaures advised them to resist such provocation. Even after the dismissal of two of their leaders, they refrained from striking, although they advised the owner that they were working only to support the families of the two men. In exasperation, Ressayguier closed the works.

Jaures stumped the country raising funds for the unemployed. One day during the crisis Péguy spoke with Jaures and was invited to lunch with him.<sup>40</sup> This personal

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<sup>39</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, pp. 71-72.

<sup>40</sup>Harvey Goldberg, The Life of Jean Jaures (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), pp. 137-148; Villiers, Charles Péguy, pp. 62-63.

contact assured Péguy's esteem for his knight. "Living in a sheltered school where one had established a veritable cult for Jaures, one cannot imagine today with what innocence, affection, and respectful veneration we surrounded him."<sup>41</sup> The money raised by Jaures was used to build a new factory at Albi, where the men of Carmaux and their families moved. For Péguy this was a "heroic" instance of socialism in action.<sup>42</sup> From this initial experience Péguy continued to follow Jaures' career with enthusiasm.

The esteem in which Péguy held Jaures, however, did not extend to other socialist leaders. Péguy reserved his complete contempt for Jules Guesde. In January and February, 1900, Péguy wrote two articles under the title, "La préparation du Congrès Socialiste National," which contained a scathing attack on the Marxist's doctrine.<sup>43</sup> Péguy produced an odd assortment of similes to describe Guesde's attitudes towards freedom of thought; their only common thread was Péguy's intense dislike of them. He compared Guesde's intransigence to the authoritarianism of the old city states, the Church, and the contemporary

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<sup>41</sup> Charles Péguy, "Reprise politique parlementaire," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 602.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Péguy, "La préparation du Congrès Socialiste National," in Oeuvres complètes, Vol. XI, p. 100.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-115.

bourgeois society.<sup>44</sup>

What particularly enraged Péguy with Guesde was the latter's stand on class warfare, as demonstrated by one of his election posters which proclaimed: "'Let no employer, no capitalist vote for me; I neither can nor will, represent both classes. I only can and I only wish to be a man of one class, against another class.'"<sup>45</sup> For the architect of the harmonious city open to all men, such strict class divisions were an anathema.

When Péguy attacked bourgeois society, he attacked a frame of mind, an attitude rather than a specific group of persons. Péguy had attended school with many sons of middle and upper middle class families. He knew that material classifications could not necessarily describe feelings and motives. Furthermore, he credited the small bourgeoisie with having retained the virtues of toil and labor which the industrial workers themselves had lost.<sup>46</sup> In Péguy's opinion the growing labor movement's tactics, the slowdown, strike, and sabotage, debased the worker and destroyed his respect for honest labor. Because the bourgeoisie treated a man's work as "a security on the stock exchange," the socialist party, led by "political bourgeoisie," had adopted the idea of negotiating with

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>45</sup>Villiers, Charles Péguy, p. 133.

<sup>46</sup>Charles Péguy, "L'Argent," in Oeuvres en prose, 1909-1914, p. 1054.

the laborer's work. Only the small capitalist, in Péguy's eyes, still took pride in his product and worked to produce the greatest quality as well as quantity.<sup>47</sup>

In these two articles Péguy also praised Jaurès' rejection of class war in favor of socialist penetration. "He [Jaurès] knows very well that there are not two humanities, the bourgeois and the socialist, but that it is the same humanity, which is at present bourgeois, and which individuals and the socialist parties are trying to make become entirely socialist," he wrote.<sup>48</sup> According to Péguy, this idea of the homogeneity of all classes may have seemed in opposition to the dogma of class war, but the truth was that the doctrine of class conflict was not really socialist. All warfare was founded on rivalry, and rivalry was a bourgeois concept. To enter into class competition was to make a concession to the contemporary bourgeois ethos, "just as the armaments of a pacific people are in a sense concessions made to their belligerent neighbors."<sup>49</sup>

Yet, although Péguy eulogized Jaurès in this attack on Guesde, the distance between Jaurès and other mortals was beginning to close. Péguy took exception to some of Jaurès' views in an article, "L'Art et le socialisme," in the dutiful spirit that one should warn an idol that

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<sup>47</sup>Péguy, Basic Verities, pp. 89-95.

<sup>48</sup>Péguy, "La préparation du Congrès," p. 56.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-54.

the pedestal is trembling. In his "Réponse brève à Jaurès" of July, 1900, Péguy confessed that the term "socialist art," as distinguishable from the conception of art one had as a human being, was meaningless to him. Péguy could not understand how the great statesman could speak of using art to obtain certain ends. Art could not be subjugated to a higher authority. To promise glory and prestige to the artist in a socialist state was to ensure rivalry and competition, the very evils that were to be eradicated.<sup>50</sup> Echoes of the harmonious city were unmistakable in Péguy's criticism of Jaurès' remarks. The goal of socialism was not to exchange one servitude for another, but to free art and the artist.<sup>51</sup>

To even consider the possibility of socialist art was to rob socialism of its uniqueness.

When we say that there was Christian or pagan art, we are thus naming the representation in art of Christian and pagan humanity. But humanity will not be socialist as it was Christian or pagan. . . . It will be free, . . . above all free from us. . . . We are men who are not preparing others so that they will be like us, but we are men who are preparing men to be free.<sup>52</sup>

To allow the concept of a socialist art was, in Péguy's view, to capitulate to the bourgeois scheme of things. Thus, socialism's premise that it would basically alter

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<sup>50</sup> Charles Péguy, "Réponse brève à Jaurès," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, pp. 248-249 and 261.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 244-245.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 245-246.

society would be destroyed. The citizens of the harmonious city were to forget those who paved the way not to have it emblazoned on their memories every time they went to an art gallery or read a new novel.

That Péguy would quarrel with the man whom he had entrusted with representing virtue in politics is understandable to anyone who has taken his principles into the arena to do battle. Péguy had experienced practical politics when he had offered himself in 1899 to the Parti Ouvrier Français of Orléans as a delegate to the first General Congress of the Socialist Party.<sup>53</sup> In a Cahier of April 25, 1901, "Compte rendu du mandat," he recounted this experience and satirized what was necessary to play the game of politics well. Considering his time far more profitably spent writing in Paris, the political neophyte did not campaign but asked the voters to read his works. This they considered "too tiring."<sup>54</sup>

He soon learned that in politics the question of how to serve the social revolution most effectively was not the issue. The essential question was who could best please the voters.<sup>55</sup> Not only had he misjudged this rule of thumb; Péguy also misconstrued the delegate's role. The people did not want someone to represent them with

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<sup>53</sup>Villiers, Charles Péguy, p. 121.

<sup>54</sup>Charles Péguy, "Compte rendu du mandate," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 349.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 348.

delegates from other districts but against other delegates. "The best delegate from Orléans will thus be the one who will defend best vinegar and quilts and the canal from Orléans to Combleaux."<sup>56</sup> The French equivalent of log-rolling seems not to have been included in the course of study at the École Normale!

Not only did Péguy fail miserably at the mechanics of campaigning, but he managed to have himself labeled that most disparaging of terms: an intellectual. This epithet came from his having a higher education than most of the voters. His opponent was a typographer, and although he had never had time to practice his trade, he seemed more suitable as a man of the people. Even though Péguy, in his capacity as an editor, "works with printers" and "corrects proofs, ruining his eyes," as well as "ties up bundles, sticks on stamps, compiles lists, makes out invoices, lines up orders, and stacks books," he was not considered a manual worker.<sup>57</sup> The results of the voting were to be expected; the only surprise was that Péguy did as well as he did. His opponent obtained six votes, besting Péguy by one and thus receiving the right to cast Orléans' eleven votes at the Congress. This rule led the loser to quarrel with an electoral process that was not

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 373-374.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 371-372.

proportional and to question "what kind of arithmetic this is by which six equals eleven and five equals zero."<sup>58</sup>

One would suppose that such a fiasco in politics would have led Péguy to be more sympathetic to Jaures' attempts to hold together a splintering party organization. However, Péguy's own unwillingness to follow accepted political rules made him even more dogmatic in what he expected of Jaures. He could not understand why Jaures would compromise his stand on issues to achieve unity.

In "Demi-réponse à M. Cyprien Lantier," written in November, 1900, Péguy again pointed out flaws which he regarded as dangerous. He depicted an imaginary session of the general committee of the socialist party. A motion was put forward promising party support to any Jew who was threatened by anti-Semitism. Jaures spoke eloquently in support of the motion. However, he soon realized that the various factions of the party were going to use the issue to further their own interests.<sup>59</sup> Péguy took great delight in dissecting all the compromises made before a motion finally passed guaranteeing protection only to Jews who were party members and who signed a pledge of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 375.

<sup>59</sup> Charles Péguy, "Demi-réponse à M. Cyprien Lantier," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 284.



fidelity to party principles. This elaborate formula of Péguy's invention had to be renewed after six months.<sup>60</sup>

By 1901 Péguy had deserted the pose of the bantering critic and his attacks on Jaurès became more severe. Part of his virulence can be attributed to a natural bitterness stemming from the destruction of youthful illusions. However, a new force, in the person of Georges Sorel, who had come into Péguy's life, also increased the stridence of his tone. Péguy was twenty-seven and Sorel fifty-three when they first struck up a relationship which lasted for nine years.<sup>61</sup> The old Syndicalist shared with Péguy an appreciation of the value of the family, the local community, and honest labor. Both Sorel and Péguy were temperamentally compatible in their call for heroism, their emphasis on a moral metamorphosis of society, and their unorthodox patterns of thought.<sup>62</sup>

Until Péguy discovered how little Sorel treasured the rights of the individual, "Father" Sorel regularly spent Thursday afternoons holding forth in Péguy's shop. There "ideas which for sixty years had been accumulating behind the dam flowed endlessly from his lips like water

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>61</sup> Villiers, Charles Péguy, p. 136.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Curtis, Three Against the Republic: Sorel, Barrès, and Maurras (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 119-120; Onimus, La Route de Charles Péguy, pp. 74-75; Swart, The Sense of Decadence, pp. 203-204.

escaping from a sluice." The range of topics on which he was knowledgeable was extraordinary. "He passed without transition, with incredible ease, from a description comparing the uniforms of the Roman infantryman and those of the Guards to a discussion on Plotinus or Saint Theresa."<sup>63</sup> His effect was spellbinding, and his antipathy toward the parliamentary tactics of the French Socialist Party must have influenced the vehemence with which Péguy began to criticize Jaures.

By March of 1901 Péguy's denunciations of Jaures were showing that the differences in their philosophies were obvious and widening. The excuse for Péguy's venting his displeasure with Jaures was another article by him, "La philosophie de Vaillant," published in La petite République. In it Jaures praised the militant Blanquist for his monism. Péguy responded with "Casse-cou," in which he attributed Jaures' testament to Vaillant to an attempt to please his enemies and create unity within the party. "When you [Jaures] say that the citizen Vaillant rises above quarrels and disagreements, you lie to us for socialist unity. You know very well that the old romantic Blanquist conspirator amuses himself in the quarrels, disagreements, and schemes."<sup>64</sup> Péguy believed that

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<sup>63</sup>The Tharauds, Notre Cher Péguy, pp. 170-171.

<sup>64</sup>Charles Péguy, "Casse-cou," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 311.

Jaures' metaphysics were controlled by his political concerns, that he was a monist in metaphysics because his sole aim in politics was unity. What Péguy abhorred was Jaures' total neglect of freedom.<sup>65</sup>

This preoccupation with freedom has led to Péguy's being labeled an anarchist.<sup>66</sup> Romain Rolland believed "this almost morbid passion for liberty is the very soul of Péguy."<sup>67</sup> Unity achieved through compromise was a sham for Péguy. He had fought it when he had been a candidate in his one ill-fated venture into politics. "The word unity is a marvelous word. By it we make miracles. We well equal the priests. . . . We invoke unity always at the moment we quarrel the most . . . like a litany: Saint Unity, pray for us, Saint Unity, Saint Unity."<sup>68</sup> He continued to fight what he considered the misplaced emphasis on the dogma of unity in Jaures' frantic efforts to control the warring socialist factions.

For Péguy to single out Jaures for his attack on unity was not only traceable to his disillusionment with a broken idol. It was also a need of the poet in him.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 317-318.

<sup>66</sup> Romain Rolland, Péguy (2 vols., Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1944), Vol. I, pp. 94-95.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>68</sup> Péguy, "Casse-cou," p. 365. The italics appear in the original.

He could not deal with ideas in the abstract; they had to be personified by a man. He had to have constant recourse to reality, be in constant touch with the concrete, in order to keep inspiration alive.<sup>69</sup> Thus, throughout Péguy's works there were vignettes of Jaurès as Péguy returned again and again to his person to attack a heresy. It was in the spirit of watching an old comrade going astray that Péguy had seen Jaurès capitulate to keep the party intact. He felt a moral compulsion to correct his course, no matter how stinging his remarks had to be.<sup>70</sup>

Péguy did not decry all unity, and thus was not really an anarchist. What he detested was enforced uniformity. He differed fundamentally from Jaurès in that the latter believed that unity was the prerequisite of action and accomplishment. Péguy, on the other hand, thought that freedom created unity and harmony. To put unity foremost was, in Péguy's eyes, tantamount to making a concession to politics and to violating the principles which should direct one's actions.<sup>71</sup>

From this basic difference in emphasis came criticism

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<sup>69</sup>Guyot, Péguy pamphlétaire, p. 18.

<sup>70</sup>Charles Péguy, "Courrier du Russie," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 862.

<sup>71</sup>Péguy, "Réponse brève à Jaurès," pp. 240, 256 and 263-264.

by Péguy of the devices used to develop, sustain, and perpetuate the illusion of unity. His greatest hatred was reserved for propaganda, because he saw no need for it. The benefits and logic of socialism were such that they required no advertising. Socialism "has no need for an advocate," he wrote. "It requires only a demonstrator." The value of socialism was inherent, not a quality to be tacked on by its supporters.<sup>72</sup> What Péguy desired from socialists was witnessing, not evangelism.

Not only did Péguy think propaganda unnecessary, but he also resented the attitude its use assumed towards people. To be effective it supposed propagandists, those who knew the facts, and the masses who were uninformed. The propagandist transformed the truth to educate the people as he wished. The result was a debasement of the individual through the supercilious attitude of those controlling the facts. To practice his craft the propagandist

disguises certain deeds, certain men, certain events, certain ideas, certain images. He introduces certain lighting effects. He arranges, sets up, and fashions the scenery. He regulates the perspectives. He distributes, produces, and contributes the coloring. Thus he obtains a satisfactory picture.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Péguy, "Pour ma maison," p. 1254.

<sup>73</sup>Charles Péguy, "Pour moi," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 1285.

Whether or not something was satisfactory was not the criteria by which Péguy felt something should be judged worth printing. The only line he would allow drawn was between truth and falsehood.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, Péguy sensed that propaganda indicated a fair weather attitude towards socialist principles. Because his own commitment amounted to more than just party allegiance, he could not tolerate propaganda which could slant and change the official stand on an issue. Adherents to such tactics were to Péguy like bad Catholics who "go to mass from ten to eleven on Sunday, with readied souls. . . . From noon on this Sunday to ten o'clock the following Sunday they return to what they were. . . . On the other hand, good Catholics are Catholics during the week and Sunday furnishes them only a freshening of their faith."<sup>75</sup> The parallel was clear if an unusual one for a non-believer: good socialists live their socialism daily.

These early articles bespoke a growing isolation as Péguy came to realize that the party to which he had attached himself did not share his beliefs on socialism. His poetic imagery was of little use at the ballot box, where many socialists measured their strength. His

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<sup>74</sup>Charles Péguy, "Lettre du provincial," in Ceuvres en prose, 1898-1908, pp. 94-95.

<sup>75</sup>Péguy, "Pour moi," p. 1284.

uncompromising stand on principle with its concomitant fervor of the convert only served to aggravate party disunity. Constant comparisons of flaws in the Socialist Party to like weaknesses in the Church did little to endear him to a party seeking to make political gain out of the issue of anti-clericalism.

The roots of Péguy's socialism are for the most part a riddle. He was probably unfamiliar with the writings of such classical socialist thinkers as Marx, Saint-Simon, Proudhon, or Fourier.<sup>76</sup> His desire for a community of all men, similar to that he had experienced as a child in the village, together with his compassionate crusade against injustice, led him to respond to the idealism seemingly offered by socialism. Perhaps his schoolmates, the Tharauds, were closest to the truth when they said, "Péguy's socialism was more akin to that of Saint Francis of Assisi than to that of Karl Marx."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Eric Cahm, "Fidélité de Péguy à la tradition socialiste," in Péguy, Actes du Colloque International d'Orléans (Paris: Cahiers de l'Amitié Charles Péguy, 1966), p. 59; The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, pp. 20-21.

<sup>77</sup> The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, p. 20.

CHAPTER II  
PÉGUY AND THE DREYFUS AFFAIR

On a fall evening in 1894 three earnest young men met at a café in the Latin Quarter of Paris. The seriousness of their encounter was attested by the very presence of one of them--Charles Péguy only entered a drinking establishment for the gravest of reasons. All were students entering the École Normale Supérieure the following day, and the evening's topic of discussion was how each would conduct himself during the canular, a three-day period of hazing by older normaliens. With that exaggerated sense of personal dignity of which all freshmen must be robbed, the trio viewed the harmless tradition with unconcealed disdain. In the streets newsboys were hawking the latest headline, the arrest of a certain Captain Dreyfus for treason, but this name ringing in the air for the first time did not intrude on the threesome's conversation. They were far too concerned over the propriety of kissing the lowest vertebra of a skeleton kept in the natural history department of the École Normale.<sup>1</sup> This initial detachment towards one of

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<sup>1</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, pp. 48-49.



the greatest crises of French history would not endure for Charles Péguy.

It is difficult today to recapture the violent antipathies which the fate of Alfred Dreyfus evoked during the more than ten years in which it occupied attention in France. From the mass of intrigues, forgeries, and camouflages, it is only recently that the special muse of historians, hindsight, has been able to render a complete and dispassionate survey of the events which finally culminated in the complete restoration of Alfred Dreyfus in 1906.<sup>2</sup> However, the mere recounting of this maze of incidents cannot totally convey the overriding issues which the case came to represent in the minds of many Frenchmen. Those supporting the verdict of guilty included sincere believers that justice had been rendered in an impartial manner. But they were also joined by men who felt that the traditional institutions of the country, personified in the army, could not be challenged for fear of anarchy. On the opposing side were ranged contenders for individual justice, as well as foes of the Republic eager to ride an issue which could discredit the government. As if such partisan stands were not enough to inflame passions, religious questions were thrust into it. Despite the Pope's earnest desire to keep the Church

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<sup>2</sup>See Guy Chapman's excellent study, The Dreyfus Case: A Reassessment (New York: Reynal & Co., 1956).

out of the issue, the French clergy took the side of the army and defied anyone to fail to submit to its authority. Edouard Drumont led a small but vocal press in making an issue of Dreyfus' Jewish origins, and brought to the foreground a latent anti-Semitism on the part of many Parisians.<sup>3</sup> As a contemporary remarked, "France seemed to have returned to the Wars of Religion; the possibility of a new Saint Bartholomew's . . . was not excluded."<sup>4</sup>

Such was the climate which led nervous hostesses to append to their invitations the request that the Affair not be discussed.<sup>5</sup> A man like Péguy, whose stand in defense of Dreyfus destroyed friendships of many years duration,<sup>6</sup> is an invaluable source for realizing the extent and nature of this fury.

The year at the École Normale on which Péguy and his two companions were about to embark brought them under the influence of Lucien Herr, the school's librarian. Herr was an early believer in Dreyfus' innocence. He inculcated this conviction in the minds of many of the young students, especially Péguy.<sup>7</sup> Comparison of the handwriting

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-29.

<sup>4</sup>Jules Isaac, Expériences de ma vie: Péguy (2 vols., Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1960), Vol. I, p. 131.

<sup>5</sup>Chapman, The Dreyfus Case, p. 199.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Péguy, Souvenirs (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), pp. 72-73.

<sup>7</sup>Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, p. 122; Péguy, "Pour moi," p. 1261; The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, p. 104.

of the borderceau, the incriminating evidence in the first Dreyfus trial, with that of Dreyfus, as well as irregularities in other trial documents, convinced Herr that the occupant of Devil's Island had been wrongfully judged.

Péguy had little patience for such textual criticism and precision. There was no mark of anti-militarism on him either, for his year's service in the army prior to entering the École Normale had left only pleasant memories. Péguy, despite his professed atheism, felt no specific animosity towards the Church either. His defense of Dreyfus cannot be attributed to a personal break with the Church, for he refrained from letting his religious views lead to a general antagonism toward organized religion. In his mind the struggle for Dreyfus had immediately taken on an epic grandness. "It appeared in the form of a tragedy of Sophocles or Corneille. This was the continued debate between Creon and Antigone, between Felix and Polyeucte, between the written and unwritten law, between the profane and the sacred."<sup>8</sup>

Not only did the Affair assume these transcendent qualities in Péguy's imagination; it also held for him a compelling sense of urgency. His disappointment in living in a "period" could be effaced by this opportunity to defend the principles of justice and truth which he believed were France's hallmark. The Dreyfus Affair was

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<sup>8</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, p. 94.

the chance of a lifetime for Péguy and his generation and one which in his estimation would not present itself twice.<sup>9</sup>

By 1897 the public was being roused from its concern over French security and relief that a traitor had been caught and punished through the efforts of Émile Zola and Georges Clemenceau. The publication of Zola's "J'accuse" in the Aurore in 1898 after the acquittal of Major Esterhazy, the probable traitor in the minds of most Dreyfusists,<sup>10</sup> brought the battle lines clearly into view. "J'accuse" was the "revelation of a protagonist" who refused to accept or acknowledge defeat. For men like Péguy, its appearance was a rallying cry to keep on fighting. "All day in Paris the newsboys were crying in hoarse voices the 'Aurore,' were running with the Aurore in large bundles under their arms, were distributing the Aurore to eager buyers," he wrote. "This newspaper's beautiful name, not yielding to the hoarseness, hovered

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<sup>9</sup>Charles Péguy, "A nos amis, a nos abonnés," in Oeuvres en prose, 1909-1914, p. 44.

<sup>10</sup>I have used the term Dreyfusist to refer to all supporters of Dreyfus' innocence, whatever their motives. Guy Chapman applies this term only to those who quite early believed a judicial error had been committed and sought a legal re-examination of the case. Chapman reserves the term Dreyfusard, coined by opponents of revision, as a term of contempt, for those who tried to use the cause for personal and political advantage. Since this chapter does not deal in depth with all aspects of the Dreyfus case, I have not felt that such distinctions are applicable.

like a clamor over the feverous activity of the streets."<sup>11</sup>

The year 1898-1899 saw even more street activity in the form of clashes by groups of different persuasions. Péguy's book shop in the Latin Quarter near the Sorbonne became a center for students of Dreyfusist leanings. Excited discussions filled the air of the little enterprise and probably dissuaded what potential customers there might have been from entering.<sup>12</sup> However, these young men were not just vain discourses on the Affair: the militance of their words was matched by action. A participant in these debates has vividly described their forays whenever anti-Dreyfusists were staging a demonstration or threatening Dreyfus supporters at the Sorbonne in the following words:

Everyone immediately rushed for the umbrella stands, I ought to say, rather, the arms racks, because in these quarrelsome years of '98 and '99, when epic struggles shook the Quarter every day, the umbrella stands were abundantly supplied with canes and clubs in expectation of battles. Armed with our cudgels we ran out into the street. . . . Péguy marched at the head, his great cane in his hand held in the middle like a staff of command. In these excitements he carried the ardor of a companion of Jeanne d'Arc or of Jeanne herself descending on an English platoon in the plain.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Charles Péguy, "Les recentes oeuvres de Zola," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 538.

<sup>12</sup>Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, p. 145.

<sup>13</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, pp. 111-112.

These young protagonists did not enter into these clashes light-heartedly. Most realized the gravity of their actions, for slowly through them Paris acquired the climate of a civil war.<sup>14</sup>

In view of his own pugnacious commitment to Dreyfus, Péguy could not understand the reluctance of the Socialist Party to take an official and unified stand on the same side. Péguy had been a socialist before he was a Dreyfusist, but the two became intertwined in his mind. Socialism represented the battle against universal injustice; Dreyfusism was a fight against one specific injustice. Péguy went to see Zola soon after his open letter to the President of the Republic, and they discussed this failure of socialism. The young crusader found comfort in this resident of a wealthy bourgeois neighborhood who looked not at all like a member of the bourgeoisie. He looked more like the "peasant who stepped out of his house because he heard the coach go by."<sup>15</sup> Zola was not a socialist, but he was dismayed by his abandonment as a defender of individual justice by many socialist leaders. Péguy assured him that those not with Zola and his cause did not truly represent the principles of socialism.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, p. 145.

<sup>15</sup> Péguy, "Les recentes oeuvres de Zola," p. 538.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 539.

The numerous schisms in the party hierarchy made a consensus on the Dreyfus issue a near impossibility. Edouard Vaillant and his Blanquists, whose followers were the small shopkeepers of Paris, refused to commit themselves in a Jewish cause. Many were blatant anti-Semites. Although Jean Allemane's group was for revision, Alexandre Millerand, a powerful member of the independent wing of the party, supported the army and opposed any reopening of the case. Jules Guesde's philosophy became the guiding frame of mind for many; since Dreyfus belonged to the capitalist class, let the enemy fight it out among themselves--it was not a problem for socialism. Later in the Affair socialists were to claim they were in the fore of the fight for Dreyfus, but their early behavior belied this line.<sup>17</sup>

Jules Jaures did lend his oratorical skill in support of the opinion that socialism's rightful stand was against injustice, whatever its victim's economic class. He thus accepted Péguy's moral view of the issues as well as the tactical consideration that those discovering the government's iniquity for the first time could perhaps be rallied under the socialist banner.<sup>18</sup> Péguy thought Jaures' stand heroic and later reminisced about a

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<sup>17</sup>Chapman, The Dreyfus Case, p. 182; Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup>Adereth, Commitment in Modern French Literature, p. 63.

conversation he had with Jaurès while walking with him to the chamber of deputies in the early years of the Affair. The young idealist could not understand Jaurès' wish to unify the party in support of Dreyfus. "What do these deputies, these ministers, these politicians matter?" he queried. "There's no need for a lot of us." Only the truth of one's cause mattered to Péguy, and "since we are right, since we are just, since we are true, let us begin to march. If the others follow, so much the better. If they do not or if they fight us, better to march without them, to go forward than to stay behind with them."<sup>19</sup> Jaurès explained to his young admirer that he felt compelled to try to guide his socialist comrades into a commitment to Dreyfus. He described the bitter internal feuding that was then going on within the ranks of the party. He told Péguy that newspaper accounts of his speeches and activities could give no indication of the torment he was enduring from party members. Continuing, he declared:

Enemies and adversaries are nothing. It's one's friends. You cannot imagine how worn out I am. They eat me, they devour me, they are all afraid of not being re-elected. They grab my coattails to keep me from going to the speaker's platform. When I mount the dais, I am already drained. . . . I am debilitated in advance. The other day while I was speaking, against this cowardly and hostile chamber, it was as if I had a

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<sup>19</sup>Péguy, "Reprise politique parlementaire," p. 603.



thousand needles going through my brain.  
I thought I was going to become ill.<sup>20</sup>

For Péguy, this was Jaures' "time of pain and true honor."<sup>21</sup> Later basic philosophical disagreements would destroy their friendship, but Jaures was a source of inspiration to Péguy at this time.

However, despite Péguy's esteem for Jaures and his lonely position, the hero of the Affair for Péguy was not Jaures, nor was it Alfred Dreyfus. The captain had become a symbol of virtue wrongfully trampled. The reality of the man did not measure up to Péguy's high standards. Péguy could understand how Dreyfus would be unsure of his actions due to his sudden rise from virtual obscurity into the focus of everyone's attention. However, Péguy failed to understand how Dreyfus could accept a presidential pardon in 1899.<sup>22</sup> When men were sacrificing their careers, the peace of their homes, and the companionship of old friends, it seemed inexcusable to Péguy that Dreyfus should accept absolution for a crime he did not commit and retire from the fray by the grace of his opponents.<sup>23</sup> Péguy did not doubt that Dreyfus was

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, pp. 186-187. Péguy at first thought that Dreyfus should accept the pardon but later he changed his mind and chastised Dreyfus for doing so.

<sup>23</sup> Péguy, "Notre Jeunesse," p. 541; The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, pp. 128-129.

probably a good man in the ordinary sense of the word, but he demanded and expected extraordinary qualities in those he chose to be heroes. Péguy regretted Dreyfus' failure, but he felt compelled to judge his betrayal of his fame. "What is most fatal, most painful, most tragic is the fact that we cannot help having to call him [Dreyfus] to account for it. He who is chosen must move forward. He who is called must answer. This is the law, this is the rule, this is the level of heroic lives, this is the level of lives of holiness."<sup>24</sup>

The man who did conform to Péguy's heroic illusions was his Jewish friend, Bernard Lazare, a left-wing intellectual and journalist. Quite early Lazare believed the court-martial had made an error and approached Mathieu Dreyfus, the brother of the convicted man, with his beliefs on the contradictions in the trial evidence. In 1896 Lazare published a pamphlet, La Verité sur l'Affaire Dreyfus. It was received only with coolness in influential circles, but Lazare kept up his lobbying.<sup>25</sup> For Péguy, Lazare was the "immortal author" of Dreyfusism.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Péguy, "Notre Jeunesse," p. 637.

<sup>25</sup>Chapman, The Dreyfus Case, p. 135.

<sup>26</sup>Charles Péguy, "Librairie des cahiers," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 327. Péguy also praised Colonel Picquart, who risked his career to make public the new evidence he had discovered in the army's statistical section, and called him the "second first author" of the Affair. By this he meant that if there had been no Bernard Lazare, Picquart would have reaped all the glory.

With his heterodox and moralistic conception of socialism, coupled with a naive idealism, Péguy found much to admire and even canonize in Lazare. This Jewish free-thinker was only equalled by Péguy himself in his disdain for constituted authority's judgment and written law re Dreyfus. For both of them a higher law must be appealed to, and though Dreyfus be condemned by fifty courts-martial, his innocence would not be impugned.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, in Péguy's eyes, Lazare was an ignored prophet, ignored not only by France but by the Jews themselves. Péguy considered Israel's unawareness of its prophets a part of its history, and this only increased his belief that he had truly found one in Lazare.<sup>28</sup> He explained other Jews' reluctance to acknowledge Lazare and the innocence of Dreyfus by a generic desire: "The whole policy of Israel is to make no noise in the world, enough noise has been made, to purchase peace with prudent silence. . . . Israel wishes to be forgotten. She still has so many smarting bruises."<sup>29</sup> Apart from Péguy's penchant for exaggeration, the explanation has some merit. Jules Isaac, a Jewish contemporary of Péguy, stated that he hesitated to enter the Dreyfusist camp for fear of

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<sup>27</sup> Péguy, "Notre Jeunesse," p. 565.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 549.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 547.

receiving taunts of racial solidarity.<sup>30</sup> Others shared Isaac's reluctance. Many Jews remained neutral and the majority were openly hostile to the cause of revision. In view of his Semitic origins, Lazare's campaign was indeed an isolated case.<sup>31</sup> Péguy found it a great irony as well as a tragedy that the only newspaper that treated Lazare in the measure of his greatness, although as an enemy, was Drumont's anti-Semitic La libre parole.<sup>32</sup> Overworked and exhausted, Lazare died in 1903, giving Péguy a martyr as well as a prophet.

Except for a small minority of men like Lazare and Péguy, most Frenchmen did not consider Dreyfus' acceptance of the pardon a travesty. Far from desiring legal acknowledgment of Dreyfus' innocence, the majority of the nation considered the issue a dead letter and wanted tranquility to return to the political scene. At the first General Congress of French Socialist Organizations in December, 1899, unity rather than justice was paramount,

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<sup>30</sup> Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, p. 123.

<sup>31</sup> Chapman, The Dreyfus Case, p. 538. Joseph Reinach and a few young intellectuals, including Marcel Proust, Daniel and Elie Halévy, and Léon Blum, were the only Jews who were outspoken in defense of Dreyfus. Most of these young writers were little known at the time.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Péguy, "A Portrait of Bernard Lazare," in Bernard Lazare, Job's Dungheap, Essays on Jewish Nationalism and Social Revolution, with a Portrait of Bernard Lazare by Charles Péguy, translated by Harry Lorin Binsse (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), p. 24. Of course, Péguy's own Cahiers de la Quinzaine was an exception to this. Lazare wrote articles for this journal.

and much to Péguy's sorrow no commitment was made on behalf of the party to Dreyfusist justice. Even more horrifying to Péguy was the turn political action began to take.<sup>33</sup>

Previously in the elections of 1898 the Méline government had gone down to defeat at the hands of a left bloc held together by a shared anti-clericalism. The socialists used the complicity of the Church in support of the anti-Dreyfus cause as an excuse for attacking an ancient foe. The Church became the target for a wave of laic legislation primarily aimed at its wealth and its separate school system. The battle lines of earlier campaigns were not disappearing; it was merely that the opposite side was now in the ascendancy. From 1900-1905, through a succession of anti-clerical measures, secularization of the schools and separation of Church and state were completed. The interim elections of 1902, in an unusually heavy turnout, provided an overwhelming mandate for the government policy.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Adereth, Commitment in Modern French Literature, pp. 105-106; Schmitt, Charles Péguy, p. 14; Nelly Jussem-Wilson, Charles Péguy (New York: Hillary House Publications, 1965), p. 29; Péguy, "Lettre du provincial," pp. 34-35.

<sup>34</sup>The Association Law (January 15, 1901) decreed that no religious congregation could function without a bill of authority passed by both houses of parliament. New congregational schools required a permit from the chamber of state. By 1903 more than 12,000 congregational schools were closed. A 1904 bill granted a ten-year period of grace at the end of which all Church schools would be closed. State subsidies stopped to the clergy in December, 1905. In the elections of 1902 the anti-clerical bloc obtained 350 of the 588 seats in the chamber of deputies.

Jaures was returned to the chamber in these elections after a four-year absence. Elected vice-president of the lower house, he was at the height of his power for the next few years. Also in 1902 Émile Combes succeeded to the ministry following the voluntary resignation of René Waldeck-Rousseau. Combes and his radical supporters depended on the socialist vote to carry out their anti-clerical legislation. Jaures hoped to achieve his own program of social reform by supplying that support in trade for votes for his own legislation.<sup>35</sup> In the words of a spectator, "to Waldeckism which had style, good manners, and links to strong French traditions, was going to succeed Combism, anti-clericalism of the most virulent and vulgar variety, even taking the form of brutal religious persecution; Jaures, followed by his socialist troops, did not hesitate to put all his oratorical power in the service of radicalism."<sup>36</sup>

This political compromise on the part of Jaures brought Péguy's wrath into the open. Their disputes had formerly remained in the realm of ideological differences, but Péguy now began a bitter, personal attack accusing the socialist leader of treachery and desertion.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Dennis W. Brogan, The Development of Modern France (1870-1939) (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1944), pp. 351-352.

<sup>36</sup>Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, p. 280.

<sup>37</sup>Rolland, Péguy, p. 97.

In a June 16, 1903, article, "Reprise politique parlementaire," Péguy accused Jaures of being authoritarian in using his political power. Péguy depicted this change as a result of Jaures' great gift as a speaker. In Péguy's critical opinion, because Jaures had become accustomed to winning over party recalcitrants with the facility and glitter of his speech, he now thought he could establish a similar authority to command all of France. Jaures' compromise with Combes' radical anti-clerical proposals was a natural concomitant to this penchant for authority. In Péguy's words, "He has not so much become authoritarian by the effect of his radicalism, as he has, on the contrary, become radical by the effect of this authoritarianism."<sup>38</sup> Péguy believed the desire to unify and control the party colored every decision Jaures made.

Whatever changes the exigencies of political life had wrought in others, Péguy's "moral and mental attitude" towards the Affair had not altered. He had begun by seeing it as a pursuit of justice and truth, and he continued to see it in those terms. Although not a believer, Péguy's attitude towards the revenge on the Church was very simply that two wrongs do not make a right. He refused to submit to this travesty of the principles which he found inherent in the Dreyfusist struggle. Péguy

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<sup>38</sup> Péguy, "Reprise politique parlementaire," p. 607.

characterized himself as a Dreyfusist of the "first hour"; he had not sought to command then and would not now be commanded by what he termed Dreyfusists of the "twelfth hour" who only wanted to reap political gain from the prevailing political climate.<sup>39</sup>

In later articles the bitterness Péguy felt continued to shape, even distort, his writing. He could hardly treat any subject without referring in some way to what had happened to Dreyfusism. The common experience of Dreyfusism had produced two antagonistic philosophies, in his view. In contrast to his own absolute belief in truth and justice as determiners of every action, he saw others had evolved the lesson "that justice, that truth were only the means of temporal action, . . . that one was able to invoke them as long as one was less strong; but one ought to repudiate them as soon as one had obtained the beginning of victory."<sup>40</sup> He hardly recognized men he thought he had known well who were transformed by this philosophy. Men like Herr and Jaures to whom he had once looked for guidance had become strangers (and enemies) in their new roles. To the bitterness of defeat was added surprise at its nature. Péguy asked:

Who could have foreseen that in the heart of France, in the heart of modern times, all the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 600-601.

<sup>40</sup> Péguy, "Librairie des cahiers," pp. 329-330.



hatred and barbarity of the old religious wars were on the brink of exercising the same bygone ravages? Who foresaw, who could foresee, on the other hand, that the same men who then fought the injustice of State would be exactly the same men who, no sooner victorious, would wield this same injustice on their own account? Who could foresee both this irruption of barbarity and this reversal of servitude? . . . Who could foresee that from so much evil would come forth so much good, and from so much good, so much evil? From so much indifference such a crisis, and from such a crisis so much indifference?<sup>41</sup>

In an article of 1909, "A nos amis, à nos abonnés," Péguy delineated another cause of his bitterness. Not only did he feel that he and men like him had been vanquished in their struggle, but he also believed they were going to be thrust into historical obscurity. Defeats can sometimes retain a greatness of their own. For him, Waterloo was such a defeat, but the utter and complete defeat that Péguy railed against was "without grandeur, without prefatory, . . . condemned to eternal silence."<sup>42</sup> History could only deal with the facts and proofs that the past bequeathed to it. It was not significant that in reality Péguy felt that their struggle had been heroic; history would ask for their documents, statistics, monuments to determine reality and would thus pass him by.<sup>43</sup>

Through a conversation with a young boy, Péguy

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<sup>41</sup> Charles Péguy, "Zangwill," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 737.

<sup>42</sup> Péguy, "A nos amis, à nos abonnés," p. 17

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-19.

dramatically demonstrated this abyss of silence into which he felt himself relegated by history. He had stopped the boy on the street and had begun to tell him of the Dreyfus Affair. The boy stood quietly, holding his hat in his hand, and repeated "yes sir" in all the appropriate places. What Péguy at last realized was that to the youngster he was merely teaching history. "I say, I pronounce, I enunciate, I transmit a certain Dreyfus Affair, the real Dreyfus Affair, where I was drenched, where I have not ceased to bathe. . . . He listened, he received a certain system, a certain arrangement, a certain theory."<sup>44</sup> The crisis to which he had given all had become a dry topic of scholarly interest only, as far as a new generation was concerned. Young Frenchmen could not understand the passion Dreyfusism still held for Péguy and his friends.

In 1909 Péguy was presented with an opportunity to try to resurrect Dreyfusism from the dusty pages of history books. Joseph Reinach, an early Dreyfus defender, mentioned to Péguy that he would like to see an issue of Péguy's journal, the Cahiers de la Quinzaine, devoted to the Dreyfus Affair. Péguy passed on this idea to his friend, Daniel Halévy, who began to work on it and subsequently submitted his text to the Cahiers. Péguy published Halévy's article, "Apologie pour notre passé,"

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

without comment. However, he must have been seething inside, for in October, 1910, Péguy vigorously attacked Halévy's account in "Notre Jeunesse."<sup>45</sup>

Halévy's very title incensed Péguy; he felt no need to apologize for any of his actions. Why would one apologize for fighting for truth and justice?<sup>46</sup> The note on which Halévy ended his piece was hardly geared to assuage Péguy's differences with the author: "'The victim was rescued, the culprits punished. So far so good. . . . We should not sing our praises too loudly: our victory was ours, but the battle was hard won. . . . [Our] chief hope is that we may never again find ourselves in the position in which we were in December, 1897.'"<sup>47</sup> Halévy's insinuations that the whole episode should be forgotten and that the main accomplishment of the Dreyfusists was to hopelessly divide France could not be borne by a man whose chief fear was that he would be forgotten.<sup>48</sup>

Péguy felt none of the "mood of the beaten dog" that he saw in Halévy's portrait of the Dreyfusists.<sup>49</sup> His stand had been for justice and the necessity of committing

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<sup>45</sup>Villiers, Charles Péguy, pp. 250-251; Schmitt, Charles Péguy, p. 151.

<sup>46</sup>Péguy, "Notre Jeunesse," p. 561.

<sup>47</sup>Daniel Halévy, "Apologie pour notre passé," as quoted in Daniel Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1947), p. 137.

<sup>48</sup>Schmitt, Charles Péguy, p. 151.

<sup>49</sup>Péguy, "Notre Jeunesse," p. 356.

oneself to speaking out for that principle. "The question during the two or three years . . . was not at all to know whether in reality Dreyfus was innocent. . . . It was to know whether one would have the courage to recognize him, to declare him innocent. To proclaim him innocent."<sup>50</sup>

Péguy considered this stand heroic and went so far as to explain the entire Dreyfus Affair "by the need of heroism which periodically seizes this people [the French]."<sup>51</sup>

Like wars, the Dreyfus case was a temporal test of a great nation. It was very much in the line of French military history, for Péguy found that in the Dreyfus experience were displayed all that he considered French virtues--courage, valor, and constancy.<sup>52</sup> This comparison to war was more than just a metaphor to the ardent defender of Dreyfusism; he believed completely that a militaristic spirit had been at work in a generation smarting after Sedan. He did not think that the crisis could be understood unless one grasped this heroic urge and in the case of his own generation this need "for a military war and for military glory, . . . a need for sanctity. . . . If it were once more an army of lions led by asses, then it is that we remained very precisely

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 614. The italics appear in the original.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 614 and 640.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 580.

in the purest French tradition."<sup>53</sup> The leaders who had gone over to Combes had betrayed the ideals of their followers.

In addition to its heroic aspect, Péguy thought he discerned a religious character in Dreyfusist activity. "Our Dreyfusism was a religion. . . . It was a religious urge, a religious crisis," he maintained.<sup>54</sup> He did not mean this in the sense of pertaining to organized religion or to specific religious issues. In applying this term he was describing spiritual values which he assigned to the Affair. Péguy condemned the Catholic Church's hierarchy for not recognizing the essentially religious character of Dreyfusism and not leading the faithful away from anti-Semitism and misguided patriotism.<sup>55</sup>

The process by which an essentially courageous and religious movement had been degraded into rabid anti-clericalism for political gain was explained by Péguy as the destruction and transformation of the mystique by the politique.<sup>56</sup> By mystique Péguy meant spiritual values

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 641. The italics appear in the original.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 578.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 579-580.

<sup>56</sup>There are no suitable English equivalents for these two words. Both mystic and politics have connotations which Péguy did not intend. Therefore I have retained the original French to avoid misunderstanding.

which he regarded as derivative of natural law and which he felt were moral absolutes. The politique was the process by which these absolute values were sacrificed for raisons d'état or to gain power for a person or group. This transformation was not unique to Dreyfusism. "The interest, the essential question is that in each order, in each system, the mystique not be devoured by the politique to which it has given birth."<sup>57</sup>

The mystique and the politique could not even be compared to each other. They were of different orders. To compare any two systems, one must compare the mystique to the mystique and the politique to its counterpart. In some of the schools, Péguy said, the teachers compared the politique of royalism with the mystique of republicanism, and therefore came up with a distorted and adverse view of the former. The Action Française made a similar error by contrasting the mystique of royalism with the politique of republicanism. The result, too, was mistaken conclusions.<sup>58</sup> The differences between the mystique and the politique were the fundamental causes of the divisions in the Dreyfus case. The two groups were seeking salvation for the nation on two different levels. The anti-Dreyfusists sought only what Péguy termed "temporal salvation." They were willing to sacrifice one individual for

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<sup>57</sup> Péguy, "Notre Jeunesse," p. 516. The italics appear in the original.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 517.

the order and safety of society at large. The Dreyfusists sought "eternal salvation" and were convinced "that a single injustice, a single crime, a single illegality, particularly if it is officially recorded and confirmed . . . shatters and is sufficient to shatter the whole social pact. . . . A single dishonorable act will bring about . . . the dishonor of a whole people. It is a touch of gangrene that corrupts the entire body."<sup>59</sup>

Thus in ringing tones Péguy disavowed any parallel between himself and the resigned portrait of Halévy. He regretted nothing. If he were to write his memoirs, they might be entitled "Memoirs of an Imbecile," but there would not be one called "Cahiers: Memoirs of Weakness, of a Repentant."<sup>60</sup> Péguy believed that he had remained true to his mystique, the life activated by faith, elucidated in his youthful Jeanne d'Arc. In his mind, his conception of Jeanne's struggle paralleled his crusade for Dreyfus. "This old history always young, that history of yesterday, already old, joined each other in the depths of the mystique. He lived intensely these two dramas."<sup>61</sup>

We know today that Péguy's analysis of the Affair was not accurate. It was not an Armageddon with the forces of darkness battling the forces of light. Virtue did not

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp. 644-645.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 537.

<sup>61</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, p. 278.

reside solely with one side. However, it is often as important for the historian to find out what men thought they were doing as to discover what they actually were doing. In this search Péguy is invaluable. "The Affair will never fail to have historians . . . because it will always intrigue by its mysterious aspects, and also because it possesses in the history of our times the value of a civil war and of a revolution, but Péguy was its poet."<sup>62</sup> Péguy saw the issues at stake through the eyes of a poet. The real divisions were only a means of departure for describing his own crusade against evil in a world with misplaced values. He truly felt that he was a compatriot of Jeanne. Through Péguy's illusions one can begin to understand how a simple failure on the part of military justice tore the fabric of an entire nation. Moreover, in his poetic denunciation of the politique of Dreyfusism, Péguy was not far from historical accuracy. The revenge on the Church sewed seeds of bitterness whose fruit did France much harm, and the ill effects of the Dreyfus Affair on the military efficiency of the French army cannot be denied.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>63</sup>Chapman, The Dreyfus Case, pp. 321-322.



## CHAPTER III

PÉGUY AND LES CAHIERS DE LA QUINZAINÉ

"This is literally the last rendez-vous of men of good company."

--A nos amis, à nos abonnés

How difficult it is to convey the image of Péguy, the editor-publisher! So many facets of his thought and personality are revealed in his decision to start a newspaper and in his battle to maintain the enterprise. So very much lies behind the simple biographical fact that in January, 1900, Charles Péguy and a small group of friends inaugurated a quixotic journal called Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine.<sup>1</sup> In Péguy's own words, this was the beginning of his "ministry to write for the public."<sup>2</sup> To capture the development and character of this ministry, one must return to Péguy's school days in Paris. As with his socialism and Dreyfusist activity, the brief period of the École Normale is essential to understanding his eventual departure from the cloistered buildings behind the gate on rue d'Ulm. Most particularly, the youthful desires which produced the idealistic picture of the

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<sup>1</sup>Literally the name means Fortnightly Notebooks. See also post, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Péguy to Louis Baillet, [April or May, 1902], in Péguy, Lettres et entretiens, p. 51.

harmonious city must be grasped, for "one cannot know the crisis of thought from which came the Cahiers if one has not begun by being impressed by this Dream . . . which represented the Eden of . . . young hopes."<sup>3</sup>

"Utopia" was the word some wag of a normalien had inscribed above the door of Péguy's study. Even the mockers were aware that the renovation of society was being prepared inside. A newspaper combining rigorous truth with a fraternity of kindred minds was to represent the harmonious city in a microcosm.<sup>4</sup> Of course, even such lofty aspirations required funds, and the actual day of publication hinged on this mundane consideration. Péguy besieged his friends and even strangers for contributions. "Like some mendicant friar, in his black cape," Péguy extorted monthly levies from those around him.<sup>5</sup> The inception of the journal, based on youthful allowances, was also to mark the beginning of adulthood and maturity.<sup>6</sup>

During the year's leave which he took to complete Jeanne d'Arc, Péguy had seen childhood friends marry and settle down into business. He began to see his life as cloistered as the school itself. The customs of the peasant village usurped the career the École Normale

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<sup>3</sup>Rolland, Péguy, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, pp. 84-85.

<sup>6</sup>Péguy, "Pour ma maison," pp. 1252-1253.

proffered. Péguy saw clearly what he would do. He would marry the sister of his dead friend, Marcel Baudouin, for such was the tradition of his community. Then he would settle into the craft for which he was suited: printer and publisher. Once again the principal of the École Normale, M. Perrot, was confronted by this rash normalien. This time there was no excuse of eye trouble. Péguy frankly stated his decisions. Perrot pointed out that in only a month Péguy would stand his final examination, which he would undoubtedly pass. Then his career would be assured, and he could take on the responsibilities of a family. Péguy agreed to continue his studies and take the examination. However in May, 1898, he opened his socialist book store and publishing firm. His academic duties would now have to compete with other concerns.<sup>7</sup>

The financial base for Péguy's enterprise rested on his wife's dowry of forty thousand francs. Luckily for domestic peace, his new family was in agreement with the use he made of the dowry. As Péguy put it, "With me, my family thought that a socialist should not keep for oneself an individual capital."<sup>8</sup> The publishing venture started out under an assumed name, Librairie Georges Bellais. Bellais, a close friend, had been persuaded to contribute his name to the socialist cause. This

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<sup>7</sup> Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, pp. 45-46.

<sup>8</sup> Péguy, "Pour ma maison," p. 1258.

substitution of Bellais for Péguy was to conceal Péguy's complete and total involvement from the eyes of those who had granted him a scholarship at the École Normale.<sup>9</sup>

The Librairie Georges Bellais was not the newspaper of truth which had been planned. Instead, Péguy published carefully selected manuscripts neatly printed and bound. This combination of intellectual integrity and the excellence of manual labor had also been one of the fondest dreams of Péguy and his select group of normaliens. For them a blending of the mind and the hand was the perfect socialist work.<sup>10</sup> Péguy later stated that he failed to begin the Cahiers at this time because of excessive humility and fear of becoming authoritarian.<sup>11</sup> A more likely explanation was that the editing of a newspaper was too large a task for even this brash student to tackle. Such feeble precautions were in vain. Péguy failed his examination and was left to devote his time completely to the book shop.<sup>12</sup>

What an odd shop it must have been! The location hardly suited the architects of the harmonious city. In a neighborhood of bars frequented by prostitutes, the ground floor of a cheap student hotel had been leased

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 1259.

<sup>10</sup> The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> Péguy, "Pour ma maison," p. 1258.

<sup>12</sup> Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 46.

for the Librairie Georges Bellais. It was hardly a spot prospective book buyers would notice. From all appearances, even the house painter had not visited it recently.<sup>13</sup>

This unusual exterior for a book store with high standards was matched by the diversity of its inhabitants. The shop became a meeting place for Left Bank students of Dreyfusist leanings and soon took on the aspect of a debaters' hall. In addition to this unruly lot, apt to disappear into the streets at any moment to defend their cause, there was a sad and soulful individual named Étienne. He had been hired by Péguy to manage the store but was also prized as the "Spirit of the Downtrodden."<sup>14</sup> It was for the benefit of those like Étienne that the harmonious city had been envisioned. Rounding out the miscellaneous assortment was a black cat acquired with the premises. Péguy had made it quite clear that animals too would be citizens of the harmonious city. In fact, they were to be favored citizens, exempt from all labor since "their souls are those of eternal adolescents and human beings have towards them the duties of elder brothers."<sup>15</sup> The cat was sacrosanct and slept undisturbed on the stacks of unsold books.

It was hardly any wonder that unsold wares filled

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<sup>13</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>15</sup>Péguy, "Marcel," pp. 90 and 97.

the Librairie.<sup>16</sup> The only advertising done was when various enthusiasts from the shop would go out on the street corners in the evening and shout the titles in rhythmic tones. As one such salesman recalled, "People stopped to listen to us, laughed, and passed by."<sup>17</sup> Eight hundred quartos of Jeanne d'Arc had been brought to the rue Cujas from the author's home. They were soon joined by the Tharaud brothers' Coltineur débile in which the public was showing little interest.<sup>18</sup> Although Jérôme and Jean Tharaud were later to gain a literary reputation, at this time they recalled that their books merely provided adequate seating for the diverse group using the shop for discussion. "There were Jeanne d'Arc couches, Coltineur débile armchairs. Soon there were Jaures sofas."<sup>19</sup> Jaures had supported Péguy's venture by giving him some selections to publish. The hopes of the publisher knew no bounds and he had ten thousand copies printed. Sales amounted to eighteen hundred. At this juncture Georges Bellais panicked. His only interest had been in balanced books, and as he could be held legally responsible for all debts he wisely declared bankruptcy.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, p. 109.

<sup>17</sup>Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, p. 137.

<sup>18</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, pp. 47-48.

<sup>19</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, pp. 120-121.

<sup>20</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 48.

Péguy was naturally distressed by the failure of this crusade so naïvely but sincerely undertaken. He also felt completely responsible for Bellais' predicament. He went to Herr to try to find some remedy for the situation. Herr was sympathetic to this student who had taken his teachings so much to heart. The librarian also felt inclined to rescue Péguy for practical purposes. Dreyfusist honor was involved. The opposing side would delight in the demise of this barracks of the Dreyfusist militia. Herr also believed the publishing venture had promise if Péguy's fantasies were controlled by practical men who would not waste time and money on a Jeanne d'Arc or tales by little-knowns like the Tharauds.<sup>21</sup>

Herr took the matter firmly in hand. The shop was reorganized under a board of five directors: Herr, Léon Blum, François Simiand, Mario Roques, and Hubert Bourgin.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>All five were socialist intellectuals and university men. Léon Blum succeeded Jaurès as party leader after his death in 1914. Three times premier of France, Blum was a statesman with considerable influence on national and international affairs. He is best known for his Popular Front cabinet of 1936-1937. Blum's political involvement followed a distinguished early career as a jurist and a fin de siècle literary critic and essayist. A friend of André Gide, Marcel Proust and other young writers on the threshold of fame in the opening years of the twentieth century, Blum could well have achieved fame as a man of letters had he not been diverted into politics. François Simiand was a noted sociologist. With the others, Mario Roques and Hubert Bourgin were Dreyfusist intellectuals. Bourgin later became an extreme nationalist and rightist.

A new name went up to the relief of Georges Bellais, who was freed of his financial burden and escaped a wiser man. The Société nouvelle de librairie et d'édition retained Péguy as the editor, but he was to be definitely subordinated in policy matters to the opinions of the board, which held financial control. Restructuring was complete and business-like: Étienne joined the cat in a search for new lodgings. The directors were solely interested in a profitable propaganda tool for Dreyfusism and the socialist movement and had no use for idealistic cities of the future.<sup>23</sup> "Those responsible for such an arrangement were shocking psychologists," for the differences in outlook between the board and their visionary editor created problems from the outset.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of a ministry was still valid in Péguy's mind. The mere reorganization of his business did not impinge on his personal conception of his role as a purveyor of objective and total truth. The ideal of the harmonious city with its unlimited freedom for the intellect was his constant guide. The disparity between Péguy's goals and those of his directors was ably demonstrated by an anecdote of the Tharauds. During one of many discussions on the practical running of the business,

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<sup>23</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 49; Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, pp. 139 and 179.

<sup>24</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 49.



Herr suggested that some beer might make the time pass more agreeably. Péguy was astonished that in these conversations, which in his eyes were a prelude to the harmonious city, someone would have the audacity to consider adding a note of conviviality.

For our dear Péguy, this shop was not a shop but a chapel, a little church of primitive Christianity; his comrades were not some students, some professors, some young idealistic bourgeoisie and some politicians. They were the twelve apostles. My faith, it was as surprising for Lucien Herr to ask someone to bring some beers as to see Peter and Thomas, speaking together on the banks of the Tiber, stop their conversation to go drink at a cabaret.<sup>25</sup>

More specific incidents were to bear out this difference in philosophies. In September, 1899, Herr and Blum were astonished to read in the Revue Blanche an article by Péguy which attacked Jules Guesde. In Péguy's view Guesde knew no more about socialism than Pope Leo XIII did about Christianity during the Armenian massacres, and the Pope was totally ignorant on this subject as far as Péguy was concerned. Guesde, who had introduced the Marxist doctrine into France, was considered somewhat of an authority in French socialism. His skill at organizing the trade unions of the north was widely respected, and Jaures found this genius for organization a little unnerving in respect to his own power. Herr and Blum were well aware of the circumspection with which one

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<sup>25</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, p. 116..

should treat M. Guesde. To attack Guesde personally was error enough but to compare him to the head of the Catholic Church indicated to Herr and Blum a complete absence of rationality. If anything were agreed upon by socialists of all persuasions, it was the fundamental and paramount differences between Catholicism and socialism.<sup>26</sup>

Péguy was strictly admonished that this sort of behavior would not be tolerated. This order to refrain from personal discussion was the more restricting for Péguy, who seemed incapable of treating any issue in the abstract and apart from a protagonist. In reply Péguy questioned: "When the dictatorship of the proletariat has been proclaimed, shall I be able to mention the dictators by name?"<sup>27</sup>

Hardly had the board recovered from the tempest over the Guesde article when a second one began to brew. A book, Jean Coste ou l'instituteur de village by a totally unknown author, Antonin Lavergne, was submitted to the Société nouvelle and refused for publication by the board of directors. The story dealt with a village schoolteacher and his family who, when beset by economic despair, finally commit communal suicide in an effort to find a solution for their hopeless misery. Léon Blum reportedly

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<sup>26</sup> Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, pp. 54-55; Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, p. 199.

<sup>27</sup> Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 55.

said, "This is too long, it's boring, it's too black; no one is as unhappy as that."<sup>28</sup> Péguy believed the book should be published. His dream of discovering new literary talent, which had partly resulted in the failure of the Librairie Georges Bellais, came into direct opposition with the board's wish for scholarly, established publications.

However, this fundamental difference of opinion was not all that Péguy saw in the matter. Later, when he published the entire text of Jean Coste in an issue of the Cahiers, he set out the concerns the Jean Coste argument had held for him. Blum's reaction he considered understandable, for economic security kept him from comprehending Coste's plight. "Unless he has genius, a rich man cannot imagine what poverty really is."<sup>29</sup> In Péguy's view, Blum ignored the Jean Costes of the world, because human misery could only touch him if it were born of class strife and even then only as useful propaganda.<sup>30</sup> However, the misery of Jean Coste was real for Péguy. "He is not imaginary. He is not literary. He is true."<sup>31</sup>

Péguy left the specific dispute over the novel to

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<sup>28</sup> Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, pp. 192-193; Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 61; Charles Péguy, "Préface de l'éditeur," in Oeuvres complètes, Vol. XI, p. 231.

<sup>29</sup> Péguy, "Préface de l'éditeur," p. 232.

<sup>30</sup> Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 62; Charles Péguy, "De Jean Coste," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 528.

<sup>31</sup> Péguy, "De Jean Coste," p. 492.

describe poverty and destitution in general terms. He differentiated between these two states by saying that poverty entailed economic security, however slight that security might be. A poor man was at least assured of his scanty income. The destitute man, however, had no such security. His life was without hope. There would never be any release from suffering for the destitute.<sup>32</sup>

From this differentiation between poverty and destitution Péguy derived a moral imperative to destroy destitution by any means possible. He relegated the equal distribution of wealth to a secondary role in this task. "The duty of removing the destitute from their destitution and the duty of distributing equally material goods are not of the same order: the first is an urgent duty; the second is a duty of convenience."<sup>33</sup> Péguy cared not at all who received the vintage champagne, the fine horses, and the chateaux of the Loire as long as no man was destitute. For him this need to eliminate destitution was implied in the fraternity of the republican threesome--liberty, equality, and fraternity. The last two sentiments were more important than the first, but even equality was subordinate to fraternity. Equality would be accomplished somehow, but the primary concern must be the existence of "a city where no man can be banished or

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 494.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 509-510.

held in exile by economic destitution."<sup>34</sup>

Continuing his dichotomy between poverty and destitution, Péguy compared their differences to the Catholic doctrines of hell and purgatory. Hell was akin to destitution because it represented eternal death, entirely without hope. Poverty, like purgatory, contained pain and suffering, but there was at least the hope of eventual release.<sup>35</sup> Blum's attitude of seemingly ignoring destitute men and considering them lost forever was too similar to the Church's doctrine of the Judgment. In the face of Blum's stance Péguy offered his resignation to the Société nouvelle in the same spirit as when he had left the Catholic Church. Herr interceded, however, and persuaded him to resume his editorial duties.

There seemed to be no end to the controversies in which Péguy could embroil himself with the directors. In December, 1899, Péguy and his friend, Jules Isaac, attended the first General Congress of French Socialist Organizations as delegates. In the heated quarrels which centered around Alexandre Millerand's acceptance of a position in the bourgeois government, Jaures and Guesde were the chief debaters. To Isaac their eloquence made the debates seem as if between Jupiter and Saturn. Jaures' plea for flexibility regarding Millerand's status

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 497-499.

was defeated and Guesde's predominance was assured when he received unanimous support for a motion restricting freedom of the socialist press.<sup>36</sup> In part the motion read:

There is to be complete freedom of discussion on all matters of doctrine and method. But so far as action is concerned, the press must conform strictly to the decisions taken by the Congress as interpreted by the General Committee. In addition, the press will refrain from all polemics and all communications which could injure the organization.<sup>37</sup>

Péguy left the meeting hall in complete disgust and determined to begin immediate publication of the objective newspaper of his youth. Without delay he approached the administrators of the Société nouvelle to ask that they publish the journal. With customary naivety he was surprised and shocked by their refusal. When he at last realized the gulf which lay between them, this comprehension of reality unnerved him.<sup>38</sup> Recalling this last confrontation, Péguy wrote:

I became a fool and defended myself badly. Someone asked me what I would put in the first issue. I stammered. . . . Léon Blum said very courteously: 'Péguy, I do not wish to discuss this subject with you. What you are preparing seems inopportune to me. You come either too late or too early'-- this was a respectable opinion, well-founded or not, which deserved an amiable discussion. Simiand intervened, and confused his function as administrator of the Société nouvelle with his situation as critical

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<sup>36</sup> Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, pp. 206-207.

<sup>37</sup> Péguy, "Lettre du provincial," p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> Péguy, "Pour moi," pp. 1272-1273.

sociologist. He said: 'I see what you are doing. You wish to found a revue for imbeciles.' He said that with that thin cold smile that makes him so formidable. . . . Herr finished me off. 'Until now,' he said, 'we have too often followed through friendship in adventures which displeased us. Now this is finished. You are going against that which we have been preparing for several years. You are an anarchist.' I told him this word did not frighten me. 'It's a good thing, because you are an anarchist. We will march against you with all our forces.'<sup>39</sup>

Péguy's second resignation was accepted, and he was left to pursue his own enigmatic course.<sup>40</sup>

Some problems had to be faced, however, before Péguy's fledgling paper could be realized. First, a location had to be found. Péguy solved this by moving his office into the rooms the Tharaud brothers were then renting. Already occupied by a large plaster cast of the Victory of Samothrace which supplied inspiration but did not help the cramped conditions, the rooms were still sufficient for the gathering of École Normale friends.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 1274. The italics appear in the original.

<sup>40</sup>The Tharauds suggested still another disagreement which led finally to this rupture. They believed that Dreyfus' acceptance of the pardon was an issue between the five directors and Péguy. René Johannet accepted the Tharauds' view in his Péguy et ses cahiers (Paris: Bibliothèque des lettres françaises, 1914), p. 97. However, both Isaac and Halévy pointed out that Péguy wrote an article in 1899 stating that he considered Dreyfus' acceptance correct. It was not until after he had left the Société nouvelle that he reversed this original opinion.

<sup>41</sup>Isaac, Expériences de ma vie, pp. 245-246.

Péguy ardently outlined the rules for the new enterprise. There would be no deadlines on work. Subscription rates were subject to one's means. The new publication would not serialize books but print them in their entirety.<sup>42</sup> Péguy's role would be that of editor. He would contribute his own works, but there would be no censorship. Péguy had no hesitation as to the name; the newspaper would be called the Cahiers. In designating it this he was thinking of his school cahiers, or notebooks, all of which Péguy's mother had proudly kept locked in a cupboard. The boy had labored with great pains over them. There were no smudges, no careless slips. Each letter was carefully written at the same angle and equidistant from its neighbor, giving a total impression which Halévy described as "zebra-striping."<sup>43</sup> As publisher and editor, Péguy was to follow this same patient exactness. Every issue of the new Cahiers would be perfectly printed and expertly proofed, for he would see to it himself. The Quinzaine was added as a forecast of approximate dates of issue.<sup>44</sup>

The timely and unexpected gift of a thousand francs from a friend's mother provided economic support, and the first Cahiers appeared in January, 1900.<sup>45</sup> This issue

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<sup>42</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, pp. 58-59.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 59.



contained an article, "Lettre du provincial," in which Péguy adopted Blaise Pascal's device of writing an imaginary friend to inform him of happenings in the capital.<sup>46</sup> In the "Lettre" Péguy vented his disgust at the censoring motion adopted by the congress by elucidating the mission of the Cahiers. "To say the truth, only the truth, to say brutally the brutal truth, boringly the boring truth, sadly the sad truth," he wrote, "this is what we have proposed to do for more than twenty months, and not only for questions of doctrine and method, but above all for action."<sup>47</sup> The congress' motion that freedom would be allowed in discussion of doctrine and method but not in action seemed ridiculous to Péguy. "What is freedom of discussion," he asked, "that does not entail freedom of decision?"<sup>48</sup>

That the party congress could adopt such an attitude towards the press clearly displayed to Péguy how little the party represented true socialism. He stated that a mistake had been made when the motion spoke of "all journals which refer to socialism." Péguy said that the motion should be re-worded to apply to journals which

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<sup>46</sup> Pascal was a favorite author of Péguy's and was used as the inspiration for a series of articles: "De la grippe," "Encore de la grippe," and "Toujours de la grippe." In these "grippe" selections, describing a bout with flu, Péguy had been reading Pascal's Prayer for the Good Use of Illness.

<sup>47</sup> Péguy, "Lettre du provincial," p. 94.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

refer to the Socialist Party, "because one must distinguish from now on between socialism and the Socialist Party, just as one distinguishes between the churches and Christianity, between the Republic and republican parties."<sup>49</sup> Relieved of Herr and Blum's restraint, Péguy now reveled in ferreting out errors without regard to the odd assortment of similes which resulted.

At the end of its first eighteen months the Cahiers seemed to have weathered its isolation from organized socialism. Herr's vow to "march against you with all our forces," while not an idle threat, had not proved deadly either. Although other journals took no notice of the maverick upstart, Péguy accepted their silence with resignation. He also accepted the complete financial responsibility of the Cahiers, for he realized that if he failed this time there would be no Herr to salvage him.

Indeed, financing was the chief obstacle he had to face. The original resolve that all subscriptions would be according to one's means fell in the face of day-to-day necessities, and three new categories of subscribers were established: (1) a few were to pay a hundred francs per year; (2) the majority of persons were to pay twenty francs; and (3) a very small number would pay modest sums allotted by Péguy with regard to their incomes. The four or five hundred subscribers acquired by this method were

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

not sufficient to support the Cahiers. Even after four years of hard work had boosted circulation to a thousand, Péguy's newspaper was still on a shaky financial basis, and his brother-in-law's savings were consumed in an effort to keep the journal alive. To supplement these resources Péguy resorted to the begging he had practiced at the École Normale. He drew up a list of likely contributors and started knocking on doors.<sup>50</sup> Despite his economic difficulties, these early years were lively and full of hope for Péguy.

A new home had been found for the Cahiers at 8 rue de Sorbonne, and the move there was made in October, 1901.<sup>51</sup> In the shadow of the great university, Péguy set up his "watch tower" ready to call the professors to order if the occasion arose.<sup>52</sup> The tiny office which comprised Péguy's kingdom was the scene of animated discussions reminiscent of the early days of the Dreyfus Affair at the editorial offices of the Librairie Georges Bellais. Thursday afternoons were particularly exciting times, for then everyone flocked in to talk. Georges Sorel was accorded a place of honor and dominated the conversation. The room was filled with young writers, including the Tharauds, Daniel Halévy, and Romain Rolland. In

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<sup>50</sup> Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, pp. 69-70.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> Suarez, Péguy, p. 75.

subsequent years Jacques Maritain, the Catholic philosopher, was also a frequent visitor. Péguy sat quietly working at his desk during these debates. True to the policy of the newspaper, he never tried to manage the conversation but would occasionally edit remarks with an opinion of his own. Halévy has described Péguy's affectionate attitude toward the gathering: "I suspect his guests were like children to him, his own children chattering away. . . . He listened more than one might have believed, looking up from time to time to catch an exchange of remarks, and the speakers would notice the serious gaze of an attentive child turned on them, or else the merry gaze of a mischievous child."<sup>53</sup>

The publication which emanated from this scene of constant debate was a rich and diverse collage of opinions. Péguy intended to produce three forms of Cahiers. Some would brief readers on current happenings on the political scene. Others would attempt to expose injustice wherever the editor sensed its presence. Finally, the Cahiers de la Quinzaine was a literary digest in which the editor published entire works, many by new and unknown talents on the literary scene. The journal eventually included virtually everything Péguy wrote after the turn of the century. It also provided a forum for others. In its fifteen series were poems, novels, short stories, and

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<sup>53</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 73.

essays by the Tharaud brothers, François Porché, Daniel Halévy, André Suares, René Salomé, Jean Schlumberger, and André Spire. In all some forty authors contributed.<sup>54</sup> Georges Sorel gave two volumes to the third series of the Cahiers. One of these, entitled Socialismes nationaux, in many ways was as important as his later and more famous Réflexions sur la violence.<sup>55</sup>

One of the more exciting authors appearing in the Cahiers was Romain Rolland. Péguy and Rolland had met at the École Normale, and although differing temperamentally, they became close friends. The bond persisted, and Rolland's collaboration was one of the chief factors in the survival of the journal. Indeed, for many Rolland's importance exceeded that of the editor. As Halévy pointed out, "I should not be surprised if, for eight hundred out of every thousand subscribers, Péguy was not an obscure scribbler who had the merit of printing Rolland."<sup>56</sup> In 1902 Péguy published Rolland's Beethoven, which was a great popular success despite its lack of attention in other newspapers. In his biography Rolland expressed his own views on life, courage, and suffering. Beethoven was followed by Rolland's multi-volume novel, Jean Christophe.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the roman-fleuvre, a novel in serial

<sup>54</sup>Jussem-Wilson, Charles Péguy, p. 35.

<sup>55</sup>Schmitt, Charles Péguy, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 87.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 88-89.

form, was added to the Cahiers' repertoire.<sup>58</sup>

It was a curious mark of the Cahiers de la Quinzaine that none of the contributors were paid, not even Rolland. If the authors could not be assured of financial reward, however, they were at least confident their works would reach intelligent and influential readers, for included among the names on Péguy's list of subscribers were such eminent persons as Jaures, Millerand, Raymond Poincaré, Anatole France, and André Gide.<sup>59</sup>

The savings which accrued from unsalaried contributors, however, was offset by the deficit resulting from Péguy's refusal to allow advertising. Proclaiming his hatred of hypocrisy above all, Péguy was adamant that no article attacking an institution or group would appear in the same issue which contained an advertisement supporting that group.<sup>60</sup>

The Cahiers de la Quinzaine was peculiar in other respects also. Each issue was intended "to displease, that is to say, to rouse, to make work" at least a third of the subscribers.<sup>61</sup> Not even those who supported Péguy financially were allowed to dictate the contents or policy

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-90.

<sup>59</sup> Rolland, Péguy, pp. 129-130.

<sup>60</sup> Péguy, "Pour ma maison," p. 1251; Charles Péguy, "Personnalités," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 460.

<sup>61</sup> Péguy, "Personnalités," p. 463.

of the publication. Although he welcomed the opportunity to debate issues with those of different views and often printed contrary opinions, Péguy retained the right to go his own way. No one would gain any influence by saying, "My dear Péguy, I have given you ten francs for the month of May. You have only pleased me forty sous worth. You owe me eight francs."<sup>62</sup>

Péguy felt that his rigorous adherence to principle was unique, not because no one had thought of it before, but because he and his coterie had succeeded in actually publishing a newspaper while following such a policy.<sup>63</sup> This individualistic attitude of Péguy's was part of the larger social revolution he envisioned. The liberty to think and speak freely, he believed, would be universalized in a socialist community. To attain the ideal city of intellectual freedom, however, a great deal of work had to be done. Much evil and injustice had to be exposed and eradicated. "I never promised that these cahiers would be a delightful garden, prospering with ease and beauty. We are here for work."<sup>64</sup>

In this same passage in which he spoke of the garden, Péguy described the contemporary world as ugly and sterile. The Cahiers' role was to help sweep that sterility and

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<sup>62</sup> Péguy, "Réponse brève à Jaurès," p. 266.

<sup>63</sup> Péguy, "Personnalités," p. 468.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 443 and 459.

ugliness from the scene. In words that were to prove prophetic, Péguy recognized that he was running a risk that his own thoughts would become contaminated by the very sterility he attacked.<sup>65</sup> From the constant worry over money, his isolation from the mainstream of socialist thought, and the idiosyncrasies of his own ideas grew a frustrated and bitter man who saw himself the victim of a society which created only death and decay.

In 1908 he wrote to Halévy asking him to relieve him of his burden by replacing him as editor. Péguy not only wanted more time to write himself, but he was pursuing a variety of fantasies.<sup>66</sup> How little his plans were in touch with reality can be judged by his intention to pursue his doctorate at the Sorbonne.<sup>67</sup> One can easily imagine the august professors' reaction to this former normalien, who had failed his final examination and whose submitted thesis topic was on the role of the intellectual in debasing modern culture! Halévy, however, was in the midst of writing his biography of Nietzsche and refused the offer to replace Péguy. Péguy then resigned himself to the offices of the Cahiers.<sup>68</sup>

In 1909 in an article, "A nos amis, à nos abonnés,"

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 443.

<sup>66</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, pp. 104-105.

<sup>67</sup>Péguy, "A nos amis, à nos abonnés," pp. 12-13.

<sup>68</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 105.



Péguy gave free rein to his bitterness. This pathetic polemic amply demonstrated how tarnished the ideals of the future city had become since their bright inception. With almost masochistic delight, Péguy described the difficulties he had overcome in making the Cahiers a viable enterprise in these words: "I have known friendships and hostilities, loves and hates, concerted silence, the boycott, rough strangulation, the laic index, . . . and at all times the seige."<sup>69</sup>

In this chronicle of misfortune the Cité harmonieuse became lost in a welter of self-pity and abuse. He attacked not only those who had not supported him but extended his bitterness to include a condemnation of modern culture as degrading and to forecast the demise of all civilization. "Today no living man denies, no one contests, not even a lie can conceal that there is disorder, a growing and extremely disquieting disorder," he wrote in dejection. Hope no longer was an attitude Péguy could exercise in regard to the temporal situation, for the decadence he saw was not an artificiality from which a better world would come. It was "a real disorder of weakness and sterility; no one denies any longer . . . the confusion of spirits and hearts, the distress which comes, the menacing disaster. A debacle."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Péguy, "A nos amis, à nos abonnés," p. 12.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

The Péguy of "A nos amis, à nos abonnés" was not the same man who had written so confidently of the future in his plans for the harmonious city of "Marcel." Rolland later remarked that this intense and bitter pessimist was the only Péguy he had ever known.<sup>71</sup> However, sympathetic readers of "Marcel" must join the Tharauds and Halévy in the realization that a profound change had indeed occurred. The ideal city's boundaries had become restricted to the tiny office on the rue de Sorbonne. In the letter to Halévy, offering the Cahiers' editorship, Péguy had spoken of the job as "'from a moral point of view the highest situation and position in Paris.'"<sup>72</sup> The city that was to have banished no man had banished all men, and its one citizen was the editor of the Cahiers. Péguy's ideological and moralistic views were so uniquely tailor-made for him alone that, faced with the prospect of forced solitude, he had retreated into a voluntary solitude.<sup>73</sup> He waited impatiently for release from his despair in the war he saw approaching in Europe.

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<sup>71</sup>Rolland, Péguy, p. 91.

<sup>72</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 104, f.n. 1.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

CHAPTER IV  
PÉGUY AND FRENCH NATIONALISM

The study of nationalism is a historical specialization fraught with tremendous complexities. The period of French history from 1905 to the outbreak of the First World War is no exception to this labyrinth and offers a striking example of the maze of groups, motives, and goals which must be unraveled for a lucid appraisal of a nationalistic movement.<sup>1</sup>

The French nationalistic revival, beginning in 1905 with the Tangier incident, was marked by its association with the reactionary elements of political society. Although the tie had always been tenuous, nationalism and support of the military had been linked formerly with the left. The Boulanger crisis and the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair had catalyzed a trend which enabled rightist groups such as the ones led by Charles Maurras and Maurice Barrès to arrogate leadership of the movement. This departure from liberal nationalism was characterized by hostility to foreign nations, economic protectionism,

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<sup>1</sup>See Eugen Weber's excellent study, The Nationalist Revival in France, 1905-1914 (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1959).

denial of individual rights for the sake of national interest, and restriction of free dissent. This trend, however, should not be exaggerated in terms of its support and appeal. It was primarily a Parisian phenomenon and was concentrated in the bourgeoisie and above all in literary and political circles.<sup>2</sup> Although they constituted a distinct minority of Frenchmen, the nationalists comprised what Eugen Weber called "the great booming echo of a small sharp voice."<sup>3</sup> Unlike nationalists of the 1890's, adherents of the new movement were men in places of political importance, like Raymond Poincaré, Théophile Delcassé, and Alexandre Millerand.

Péguy was very much aware of and to a great extent part of this new temper in French politics. Indeed, Weber, who believed that contemporary literature was his most valuable evidence for gaining insight into the times, listed Péguy as one of those whose "true and to a great degree unself-conscious descriptions" elucidated the feelings of less articulate men.<sup>4</sup> But it is difficult to deal with Péguy's attitudes towards this nationalism, for his ideas were a product both of his own idiosyncratic thought and of the contemporary scene. Halévy, in a laudatory appraisal, summed up Péguy's sentiments this way: "The patriotism of Péguy is without kinship with

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<sup>2</sup>Swart, The Sense of Decadence, pp. 148 and 193-194; Curtis, Three Against the Republic, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup>Weber, The Nationalist Revival, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

these modern nationalisms, movements of urban mobs and depraved crowds. If it converges with them, this is not affinity, this is coincidence."<sup>5</sup> There is both truth and falsehood in this description.

Certainly Péguy had formed deep ties with his country. He was surrounded by its history as a child in the small village where he grew up, for "it is true that a child brought up in a town like Orléans between 1873 and 1880 has literally touched old France."<sup>6</sup> Péguy's history was alive in the person of his grandmother, who wore the peasant costume of her ancestors, and in the stories of Boitier, the blacksmith. Boitier had fought in the Franco-Prussian War and was able to regale the boy with eyewitness accounts of the campaigns around Orléans. During his entire literary career Péguy returned again and again to write about Jeanne d'Arc. A French heroine was perfect for the boy whose childhood had been spent in French history. Such influences may make a man a patriot, but they do not necessarily convert him to an aggressive nationalism.

The attitude that transformed Péguy's inheritance of a deep appreciation of France's past into a militant doctrine was a growing sense of crisis and danger to that

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<sup>5</sup>Daniel Halévy, Quelques nouveaux maîtres (Paris: E. Figuière, 1914), pp. 113-114.

<sup>6</sup>Péguy, "Pierre, commencement d'une vie," p. 1230.

heritage. In the politique of the Dreyfus Affair he saw what he considered basic French values of justice and truth degraded and even destroyed. The constant struggle to maintain the Cahiers convinced him that the nation, corrupted by money and luxury, could not appreciate a journal founded on principles of rigorous objectivity. A compelling sense of urgency and belief in contemporary decadence Péguy shared with Maurras, although little else. Their reasons for believing the nation decadent were quite different. Péguy certainly had no sympathy for royalism nor did he belabor the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to the Germans.<sup>7</sup> He even attacked the Action Française because, in his view, the organization spoke of ancient and honored traditions with sarcasm and derision.<sup>8</sup> Péguy's only point of reference with Maurras was this shared feeling that France was decaying before their eyes. From this feeling of crisis came writings of Péguy which certainly did not hamper Maurras' appeal and probably aided the Action Française as a rallying point for nationalists.<sup>9</sup>

In 1904 the Russo-Japanese War provoked Péguy out of

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Péguy, "L'Argent, suite," in Oeuvres en prose, 1909-1914, p. 1183.

<sup>8</sup> Péguy, "Notre Jeunesse," p. 651.

<sup>9</sup> As Weber points out many Frenchmen ignored the royalist foundation of Maurras' movement and only used its broad nationalist appeal. Weber, The Nationalist Revival, p. 64.

his former restive silence toward the crisis. Already convinced of France's internal decline, Péguy now saw the war in the Orient as a harbinger of his nation's international isolation. Rolland described the effect of this war on his friend's outlook as Péguy became aware of "a new era in the history of warfare, the Age of Extermination," which "had profoundly unsettled Péguy's faith in civilization."<sup>10</sup> In an article of October 30, 1904, "Zangwill," Péguy expressed his belief that humanity at large was returning to an age of barbarity. "Two peoples [Russia and Japan] confront each other with fanatical rage, of which one cannot simply say that it is barbarous, . . . but which, one must admit, seems to prove that humanity has perhaps gained nothing since the beginning of culture."<sup>11</sup> This irruption of barbarity seemed to Péguy an indication of the artificiality of the civilized world, for "the same old barbarity can reappear at a time when it is least expected, just the same, just as old, admirably preserved, . . . natural and spontaneous beneath the superficial improvements of these cultures."<sup>12</sup> The Asian war coalesced Péguy's feelings of despair, since the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair, into a fever of alarm.<sup>13</sup> Rolland watched "the brutal shock of Tangier . . .

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<sup>10</sup> Rolland, Péguy, p. 103.

<sup>11</sup> Péguy, "Zangwill," pp. 736-737.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 737.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

carry this fever to a paroxysm."<sup>14</sup>

The Kaiser had turned his attention on North Africa, where France was trying to establish a protectorate over the incompetent sultan of Morocco. On March 31, 1905, the German ruler visited the sultan and gave him assurances of Germany's support for the continued independence of Morocco. The two-fold intention of the Kaiser was to introduce German influence into the area and to disrupt the Entente Cordiale between Britain and France. France capitulated to Berlin's demand for an international conference at Algeçiras as well as the resignation of Delcassé who directed French diplomacy. This resignation on June 6, 1905, and the stiffening of Germany's attitude brought home to the French people the realization that they were in peril and that a clash with their eastern neighbor seemed inevitable.<sup>15</sup> Péguy immediately rushed out to buy the necessary clothing for an expected mobilization that June, and other Frenchmen joined him in this premature action.<sup>16</sup>

When Péguy published his reaction to the Moroccan crisis and the changed atmosphere he divined in the nation, it was not at all what one might have expected. There was hardly any mention of Germany, the Kaiser, or Tangier

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<sup>14</sup>Rolland, Péguy, p. 104.

<sup>15</sup>Weber, The Nationalist Revival, pp. 30-31.

<sup>16</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, p. 211.



in Péguy's "Notre Patrie" of October 17, 1905. The piece was probably written as a rebuttal to Gustave Hervé's "Leur Patrie," published a few months earlier. Hervé, a fervent pacifist, had ridiculed French military prowess, attacked patriotism, and delineated the myths of heroism by which Frenchmen lived. Hervé called on all socialists to resist military duty and not to fight in any wars.<sup>17</sup> However, Hervé and his message were also ignored by Péguy, and "Notre Patrie" made no explicit answer to the pacifist's program.

Instead, Péguy's article was totally descriptive. He tried to recreate the emotional climate of Paris as he had perceived it at the time, through a reverie of sights and sounds. Péguy began with the week prior to the Moroccan crisis, during which the King of Spain was visiting Paris. Leaving his office, Péguy walked through the streets of the city musing on the crowds of spectators lined up to see the parade for the royal visitor. He found their excitement and enchantment with the troops and the military trappings characteristic of the decadence and hypocrisy rampant in the nation. Péguy described the national mood in this manner:

The people wish to dream about wars; they take as much delight as ever in narratives of past wars. They love wars as much as ever provided they are fought by others. . . . Just remember how several weeks ago the people devoured the stories of the Asiatic

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<sup>17</sup>Schmitt, Charles Péguy, pp. 20-21.

war [Russo-Japanese War] in the newspapers. The people are a great deal more cowardly about making war than in other times.<sup>18</sup>

Péguy used Victor Hugo's poetry to illustrate this divided and contradictory attitude of Frenchmen towards the military and war. He found Hugo particularly representative of his people because this great author, although a pacifist, filled his poetry with military imagery.<sup>19</sup>

Walking through the streets of the capital on this festive day, Péguy was captivated anew by the beauty of Paris and especially by the history alive in its physical landmarks. His eyes caressed the Panthéon, the Arc de Triomphe, Notre Dame, and the Invalides. Every aspect of the city seemed to appear to him in a new light. "How easily Paris, in its parks, its river banks, and bridges will find again the old Paris."<sup>20</sup> Péguy was immersed again, as he had been as a child, in French history-- "Paris, capital of the world, old capital, an entire age thought to have been revolutionized."<sup>21</sup>

Abruptly the atmosphere was changed with an attempt on the Spanish king's life. The festivity and joviality faded into shadows as the criminal and his crime became

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Péguy, "Notre Patrie," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 834.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 819-820.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 820-821.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 821.

the only reality.<sup>22</sup> Péguy used this changed tone to introduce the alterations that had been wrought by the German threat to French security. Péguy was speaking for many of his countrymen when he wrote "that a new period had begun in my life, in the history of this country, and assuredly in the history of the world."<sup>23</sup> The mutual realization by Frenchmen that their nation was in peril was not voiced by one man to another. Péguy poetically evoked how in the midst of daily routine and private cares, each man suddenly knew within himself the precarious state of his country.

The spread and expansion of this knowledge, gaining from man to man, was not the dissemination in dusty discontinuous particles of ordinary news by verbal communication; but rather common, inner recognition, . . . a single sound of far-reaching resonance, as though a spring gave way with a ring. From that moment every man could hear an echo, deep down within himself, a familiar echo which he knew well, a voice which was not a voice from outside but the voice of memory, buried there from time immemorial and for purposes unknown.<sup>24</sup>

This "echo" was the French heritage, and Péguy elucidated the mortality of that heritage in "Notre Patrie." The landmarks which he had poignantly described were "imperishable monuments which will inevitably perish."<sup>25</sup> With the destruction of French culture would

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 850-851.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 851.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 853.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 813.

go civilization itself. In a later Cahier, "Les suppliants parallèles," which concerned the abortive Russian revolution of 1905, Péguy reiterated his belief that the conflict that he now saw as inevitable would be fought not just for French culture but for all culture. "Man could easily accept the fact that he grows old, that he passes, that he disappears, since such is his nature, such is his lot; if only he had the consolation that generations pass but humanity remains. Unfortunately, we no longer have that consolation."<sup>26</sup>

"Notre Patrie" was a marvelous example of Péguy's ability to extract from specific political events the essence of atmosphere and emotional feeling. He did this with little or no reference to the reality that first gave him impetus. Yet his poetic prose depicted completely the sense of alarm that had overtaken him. The work seemed lax in organization, but in the meandering of thought and image there was total purpose. The reader is suddenly caught up in the changed temper but cannot quite mark where the transition occurred. So thus was much of France caught off guard in the summer of 1905.

After Tangier and Algeçiras, patriotism had been resurrected from the ignominy of the Dreyfus Affair and was now considered good for political respectability. The result was a continuing battle between parties to

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Péguy, "Les suppliants parallèles," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 932.

outbid each other in their patriotic sentiments. This rivalry would provide the essence of the growing nationalism in France.<sup>27</sup>

A few months after "Notre Patrie," Péguy reiterated his call for constant vigilance. In an article in December, "Louis de Gonzague," Péguy envisioned the war as both inevitable and imminent. He relinquished any human control over the start of the conflict and saw the individual's only recourse and responsibility in preparedness. "It is not dependent on us that the crisis begin, but it is dependent on us that we do our duty."<sup>28</sup> Attacking Germany directly as a barbarous force, he called for national mobilization. This accomplished, the nation should continue its existence in as peaceful and relaxed a manner as possible. However, the people must be constantly on the lookout for any change in their existence occasioned by the introduction of a new element of fear or apprehension, for "it would mean a . . . beginning of servitude, the most dangerous of invasions--the invasion which crosses the threshold of inner life and which is infinitely more dangerous for a people than an invasion, than a territorial occupation."<sup>29</sup>

Péguy used the story of the young Louis de Gonzague

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<sup>27</sup>Weber, The Nationalist Revival, pp. 42-43.

<sup>28</sup>Charles Péguy, "Louis de Gonzague," in Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1908, p. 949.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 945.

at the seminary to illustrate what he meant by individual preparedness. Interrupted while playing ball, the young man was asked what he would do if he knew the end of the world would occur in the next moment. Continue playing ball was his answer.<sup>30</sup> In like manner, Péguy intended to continue editing and publishing the Cahiers under the threat of war.<sup>31</sup> From this time on, in Rolland's words, Péguy "is like the Roman legionaire, who works his fields but keeps at the field's edge his helmet and sword, ready at the first alert to be put on and girded."<sup>32</sup>

However, one threat to what he had termed "the inner life" and a cause in which he raised the weapon of his pen was not provoked by an outside force. The Sorbonne and the intellectual class it stood for became the target for a great deal of Péguy's venom. In 1899 almost all intellectuals were Dreyfusists, and the nationalists of those years considered the two synonymous.<sup>33</sup> The Sorbonne retained an anti-nationalistic tendency after the Dreyfusist victory, due to politically-motivated appointments which were predominantly filled by Dreyfusists. With

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 940-941.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 942.

<sup>32</sup>Rolland, Péguy, p. 112.

<sup>33</sup>Weber, The Nationalist Revival, p. 79. There were very few but some notable exceptions to this generalization--Ferdinand Brunetiere, Maurice Barres, Charles Maurras, and Jules Lemaitre.

this legacy of the Dreyfus Affair the Sorbonne became a natural prey for the attacks of the nationalists of the post-1905 era. However, there were other reasons for this concentration on the professors, and Péguy is quite useful in illustrating them. Despite his own Dreyfusist past and certain personal animosities toward the intellectuals, Péguy's motivations dovetailed with those of the nationalists in many respects.

The defeat of 1870 had been attributed by intellectuals to the superior quality of the Prussian schoolmaster whose more "scientific" approach supposedly engendered greater discipline and organization among his pupils.<sup>34</sup> Péguy had attended schools where this barren scientific and positivist attitude reigned supreme. Once free from the stifling environment, he constantly railed against the idea that science held all the answers to man's problems.

Modern humanity believes itself well-guarded against . . . weaknesses by its science, by the immense amassing of knowledge, by the sureness of their methods. Never has it been seen so well that science does not make philosophy, life, and conscience. So armed, so warned, so guarded as was the modern world, it is still into the oldest errors of humanity that it has fallen.<sup>35</sup>

He also resented the transference of scientific methods to history, because he believed that humanity could not be measured and analyzed so precisely and objectively.

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<sup>34</sup>Swart, The Sense of Decadence, pp. 127 and 169.

<sup>35</sup>Péguy, "Zangwill," p. 704.

History, in his view, had to develop its own techniques.<sup>36</sup>

The philosophy of Henri Bergson was like a fresh breeze to Péguy and many of his contemporaries in this stultifying milieu. Péguy was a faithful attendant of Bergson's lectures at the Collège de France. Friday was always set aside for this purpose, and with Sorel, Halévy, and the Tharauds Péguy would sit enraptured in the presence of his newly-found mentor. He felt completely at ease "in this kingdom of freshness, of growth, of spontaneity, of eternal youth" in contrast to the "dead wood" of the Sorbonne across the street.<sup>37</sup> Bergson's call to ultimate and irrefutable knowledge found a response in Péguy, whose mental outlook was so totally filled with absolutes. It also appealed to many young students who were frustrated by the skepticism of the Sorbonne.<sup>38</sup> Péguy never forgave the academicians' opposition to Bergson, and his own loyalty to the philosopher never waned.

The pervasive influence of science and the attempt to pattern methods after the German mode had also led to a diminishing emphasis at the Sorbonne on French classics, as well as those of the ancients. This provided another source of nationalist disfavor and struck at Péguy's most cherished literature. With little or no transition, he

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 739.

<sup>37</sup> The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, p. 177.

<sup>38</sup> Weber, The Nationalist Revival, p. 80.



often filled pages of the Cahiers with literary appraisals of Corneille and Racine. He admired Corneille above all and constantly drew upon his works for images and examples.<sup>39</sup> Péguy was also well versed in Greek and Latin. In "Les suppliants parallèles," he contrasted the opening scene of Oedipus rex with the Russian czar's reaction to his subjects.<sup>40</sup> It has been suggested by a contemporary that he partly drew this parallel to have the pleasure of copying Greek in his own hand and correcting proofs in Greek. At the age of forty he reread both Homer and Virgil in the original.<sup>41</sup> His esteem for both French and ancient classics stemmed from his early schooling in Orléans. His knowledge of Latin had marked him as a boy bound for a university education and thus was a source of pride. The condescending attitude the intellectuals took toward French literature and a classical education was another sign of the degradation of French cultural values.<sup>42</sup>

Personal considerations cannot be ignored, however, in Péguy's constant attacks on the intellectuals. His experience with the Société nouvelle had brought him into contact with five university men. He could not understand

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<sup>39</sup>Doumic, "Charles Péguy," p. 481.

<sup>40</sup>Péguy, "Les suppliants parallèles," pp. 868-897.

<sup>41</sup>Doumic, "Charles Péguy," p. 481.

<sup>42</sup>Péguy, "Les suppliants parallèles," p. 934.

their approach to the publishing firm, and their emphasis on practicality and profits colored his outlook toward all professors. Péguy also resented the condemnation or silence with which his Jeanne d'Arc and its sequels had been greeted in intellectual circles. Joseph Lotte, a normalien friend of Péguy's, recounted a conversation of 1910 in which Péguy poured out this bitterness: "'Ah the professors! . . . They are as in our days; . . . the blackguards haven't changed. Jeanne d'Arc furnished a type of saintliness which was not labeled or catalogued, not a peg that fits its hole. For them it was simple, she was a demon! Ah! the cretins, all the same, the intellectuals!"<sup>43</sup> However, these personal biases played a minor role as Péguy became more and more convinced that the attitude of the Sorbonne was weakening France.

The specific debate that brought all of Péguy's accumulated animosities toward the Sorbonne into play was over the proposal to increase military service from two to three years. The law providing for two-year service had been passed in 1905 in the wake of Dreyfusist anti-militarism and was generally a popular measure as it had meant a reduction of time in the army. With the increase of patriotism and the vocal lobbying of army chiefs for a strengthened military force, which could prove effective in the opening clashes of a war, came a growing demand

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<sup>43</sup>Péguy, Lettres et entretiens, p. 68.

for revision of the measure. Poincaré and his minister of war, Millerand, came to office bent on lengthening military service.<sup>44</sup> In the ensuing debates the idea of a three-year term of service became more than just a source of political differences. Support for the measure became a symbol of one's patriotism.<sup>45</sup> The Sorbonne intellectuals' opposition to the extra year brought both Péguy's criticism and ridicule.

In "L'Argent, suite" of 1913, Péguy attacked the Sorbonne as an institution endangering the security of France by undermining its army. "The Prussian army is perhaps their enemy, but the French army is certainly their enemy."<sup>46</sup> He resented the professors' attitude that they had a monopoly on reason and logical thought and that their counsel should be doubly heeded. "As if in this great Paris, in this laboratory of thought unique in the world, it is they who make thought."<sup>47</sup> Besides this patronizing air of intellectual superciliousness, Péguy found the Sorbonne's clinging to anti-militaristic shibboleths of the Dreyfus Affair ridiculous. He singled out an old friend and an old foe for his attack:

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<sup>44</sup>Weber, The Nationalist Revival, p. 110.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>46</sup>Péguy, "L'Argent, suite," p. 1153.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 1159. The italics appear in the original.

When Herr sees a soldier, he suffers. When he sees two, he feels sick. And even if these two soldiers are only commanded by a corporal, he suffers martyrdom, because he has recognized the dreadful military authority. . . . When he sees soldiers dancing with pretty girls, he suffers another martyrdom. Because this is evidently the contamination of the civil by the military.<sup>48</sup>

In his defense of the army and three-year service, Péguy split with former Dreyfusist colleagues and was reconciled with men like Millerand, whose opposition to Dreyfusist justice had earlier earned Péguy's excoriation. However, Péguy had not really changed his position. He had always made a careful distinction between the army as a traditional institution and a few reactionary commanding generals. Anti-militarism had never been a basis for his Dreyfusism. Péguy had done a year's military duty before entering the École Normale and had only pleasant memories of this association. Unlike most socialists, the image of the barracks held no repugnance for him but, on the contrary, was esteemed. Péguy's own inclination towards absolutes responded to the order and exactness of military discipline. He also enjoyed the sense of equality and comraderie shared by men in a platoon, "because he saw realized there a certain image of the society of which he dreamed."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 1153.

<sup>49</sup> The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, pp. 23-24.

Péguy had seen the Dreyfus Affair in terms of a war, explaining it by a need for heroism and glory which periodically seized the French. The crisis of France, threatened by German barbarity, offered him the chance for glory and heroism that Dreyfusism had denied him. His exhortations to valor and heroism found a response in the younger generation of Frenchmen, who more and more saw courage as a worthy goal in itself rather than a means of achievement.<sup>50</sup> Confusing the defense of France with the defense of all human values, Péguy looked to war as the ultimate insurer of personal glory. "To leave traces of his steps on the world, to capture . . . a historic inscription," was how the Tharauds described Péguy's "desire for military glory, which of all glories, according to him, was the most traditional, the most complete, the most immediately verifiable, the oldest human conception of glory."<sup>51</sup>

In his fervor for a glory that would assuage the silence he saw surrounding his former crusades, Péguy lashed out at anyone whose actions attempted to rob him of his chance. Péguy singled out Jaures as the incarnation of men preaching caution and peace. He interpreted Jaures' opposition to the three-year service bill and the

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<sup>50</sup>Weber, The Nationalist Revival, p. 113; Péguy, "L'Argent, suite," pp. 1185-1187.

<sup>51</sup>The Tharauds, Notre cher Péguy, p. 303.

defense budget, as well as his assurances that German socialists would not fight their French brothers, as a capitulation to Pan-Germanism. He did not renege at calling Jaures a traitor and a German agent.<sup>52</sup> Hervé and other pacifists he dismissed as either fanatics or misguided idealists.<sup>53</sup> He found it ridiculous that from the Declaration of the Rights of Man one could infer a brotherhood of peace. "As though a Declaration of Justice were not in itself instantaneously a declaration of war. There is only one Lady in the world who has caused more wars than injustice and that is justice."<sup>54</sup> Péguy could debate with the pacifists, using logic and reason to show them their errors. He found no such excuse for Jaures--he was a traitor and should be treated as such. "In time of war there is only one politics and that is the politics of the National convention" which "is Jaures in a cart [on the way to the scaffold] with the rolling drums to drown this great voice."<sup>55</sup> Péguy was afraid that, once war began, Jaures and his followers would act as fifth columnists. In his view it was necessary to silence these men quickly for "regimes which do not begin by extirpating

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<sup>52</sup> Péguy, "L'Argent, suite," p. 1192.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 1196-1197.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 1184.

the bad shepherds always end by butchering the flock itself."<sup>56</sup>

What particularly rankled Péguy with Jaurès was the latter's insistence that the internationalism inherent in socialism could be the basis for peace with Germany. Péguy's socialism contained no contradiction with his fervent patriotism. He scorned Jaurès all the more because he believed the socialist leader had distorted socialism into pacifism.<sup>57</sup>

For Péguy, socialism was a moral attitude, a product of the spirit, and as in any spiritual system a material body was needed as a support and prop. An idea pertaining to the social spirit, as did socialism, required a nation, a fatherland, in which it could take root and grow. As examples, Péguy cited the needs of the ancient philosopher for the Greek city, the prophet for the race of Israel, and the saint for the Christian people. "Our anti-patriots will learn the price of a carnal fatherland, of a city, of a race, . . . and, to support a revolution, the value of a parcel of earth."<sup>58</sup> Péguy's esteem for the army drew too on this concept of the spiritual need of socialism for a nation, a "temporal" body. The army was

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 1186.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 1187.

<sup>58</sup> Péguy, "A nos amis, à nos abonnés," pp. 42-43.

the force which guarded and maintained the temporal nation. "The temporal constantly guards and commands the spiritual. The spiritual is constantly laid on the bed of the temporal."<sup>59</sup>

Péguy continued to live in a state of nervous anticipation. War was coming so why prolong it? In 1913, in "L'Argent, suite" he expressed all the pent-up anxiety a nervous nation must have felt in this demi-existence of peace and war. Halévy called this article "the textbook, so sour and conscious, on that pre-war period, of life in France."<sup>60</sup> In Péguy's view, a state of virtual war had existed for nine years and should be treated as such. "War is war and peace is peace. But what are we to call this present situation which has been made for us, where we are always being asked for both at once?"<sup>61</sup>

Mobilization in August, 1914, released Péguy from his purgatory of waiting. For many the call to arms must have been a nightmare. For Péguy it was a dream come true, for in 1912 he had written to Claude Casimir-Périer, son of a President of France, that he had dreamed of mobilization and was happy.<sup>62</sup> Péguy was not unaware of the

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<sup>59</sup>Péguy, "L'Argent, suite," p. 1167.

<sup>60</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 237.

<sup>61</sup>Péguy, "L'Argent, suite," pp. 1252-1253.

<sup>62</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 229.



brutality of conflict, and he treated it as horrible. He was even firmly convinced that he would lose his life in this war. In this he was prophetic, for he fell in the first Battle of the Marne, September 5, 1914.

Péguy had seen his death as a final redress of all past humiliations incurred in the struggle for Dreyfus and the harmonious city. It is ironic that only after mobilization and his arrival at the front did he speak of being at peace.<sup>63</sup> His death was not only to retrieve his personal defeats from ignominy, but the conflict in which it would be given was to be a catharsis for all of France. Péguy seemed totally incapable of realizing any motivation for war but the transcendent goals of truth, justice and the salvation of mankind. Equating France with civilized humanity, he marched off to battle as a compatriot of Jeanne, assured of martyrdom.

However, the politique, to use Péguy's terminology, had worked its evil on the man himself. Heartfelt patriotism, founded on a positive appreciation of French culture, had been distorted into a nationalism that found only barbarity beyond its country's borders. Halévy's statement, that there was only coincidence and not affinity between Péguy and the nationalists, held true only in his earlier years and only in certain respects. Certainly Péguy, the devout friend of Lazard, violently

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

opposed the anti-Semitic tendencies of some nationalists. The royalism of Maurras and the Action Française found no echo in Péguy's republican allegiance. However, that he could overlook these elements and instead attack Jaurès so bitterly was an indication of a certain affinity with a movement which denied individual dissent in the interests of the state. The honor Péguy had envisioned in his sacrifice was tarnished by the assassination of Jaurès a few months after the Cahiers had called for "drums to drown out this great voice."

## CONCLUSION

The man who has emerged in the pages of this study was a highly individualistic thinker. So personally tailor-made were many of his ideas that even some of his friends and supporters found him difficult to follow intellectually. Péguy, as creator of a city where animals would do no work, founder of a newspaper which had all the aspects of a primitive Christian community, and compatriot of Jeanne d'Arc in all his struggles, certainly bears out Swart's statement that "it is difficult to take Péguy seriously as a thinker."<sup>1</sup> One might also conclude that Péguy's eccentricities preclude the assertion, made in this study's introduction, that he can be a window into fin de siècle France. Such is not the case, for the reactions of this political polemicist and religious poet are valuable clues to his time. The particular importance of literature and its relation to politics in France has been noted, for France's history is marked by the habitual interconnection of politics and culture.<sup>2</sup> Péguy was a striking example of this tradition.

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<sup>1</sup>Swart, The Sense of Decadence, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup>Curtis, Three Against the Republic, p. 9.

Certainly Péguy's individual brand of socialism attracted no adherents and founded no movement. However, his call for moral regeneration through political action was not a lone voice. The spectacle of parliamentary politics was not a pleasing one during this time in France. Constant internecine quarreling brought forth amazing coalitions. The Third Republic was never considered a *fait accompli* either by its supporters or by its opponents. This régime witnessed constant struggles between republicans and anti-republicans during its first thirty years. The disenchantment such turmoil produced gave rise to various schemes for society's improvement. Those who learned no practical guidelines from the architect of the harmonious city could at least sympathize with the sense of urgency which motivated him.

From the crisis in national consciousness which wracked the Third Republic came the critical years of the Dreyfus Affair. Only the poet can communicate the transcendent qualities which the fate of a lone army captain came to represent in the minds of many Frenchmen. In Péguy's poetic evocation of events lay the fundamental difference between Halévy and Péguy. Halévy later described this difference: "I had approached it [the Dreyfus Affair] as a psychological historian; he did so as a poet. He called to mind only that generous impulse

that had fired him and his friends in 1897."<sup>3</sup> Dreyfusism marked Péguy's life as it changed the French body politic. His elucidation of that effect is an invaluable source for his age.

Péguy's newspaper provides a rich guide to opinions which ranged beyond the Dreyfus issue. In the mass of journals and newspapers which characterized Parisian life, it is easy to dismiss the Cahiers as one of numerous eccentric publishings. Yet, it was a potpourri of many elements of French intellectual life. In his patronage of young writers Péguy performed the task of uniting, at least on paper, many discordant thinkers. André Suarès no doubt exaggerated Péguy's influence when he wrote, "Péguy was not the greatest writer of France, nor the most beautiful poet. But he was Péguy, great by his force, by his conscience, by his character. . . . Few men have affected their age more than he."<sup>4</sup> Péguy certainly left his mark on young men like Suarès if not on an entire age. Another devotee described Péguy's role as that of teacher and founder of "a school of the ideal."<sup>5</sup>

Even in his distorted patriotism Péguy reflected the stance of many Frenchmen. His distrust of intellectuals, his hatred of positivism, and his fear for France were

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<sup>3</sup>Halévy, Péguy and Les Cahiers, p. 139.

<sup>4</sup>Suarès, Péguy, pp. 27-28.

<sup>5</sup>Doumic, "Charles Péguy," p. 482.

influenced by personal incidents, but his call for heroic action found a ready response in the youth of France. Summing up this patriotic effect, which was enhanced by Péguy's death, a contemporary called him "our professor of heroism."<sup>6</sup>

If then Péguy is such a touchstone for his age why refer to him as a "perpetual infidel?" It is because in his very infidelities he reflected so much of the crisis of his nation. Suares has aptly answered this apparent contradiction:

Profoundly religious, he was born heretical. . . . Indeed, Péguy has been a heretic from all his religions save one: heretic of the socialist faith; heretic of the Sorbonne; heretic in establishing his publishing house; . . . heretic of the Church. . . . France . . . is the only religion where he has been without heresy. No one since Michelet has had all the history of France more embedded in his soul. Not that he knew more of it or knew it more profoundly but that he lived in it."<sup>7</sup>

As a socialist, militant chauvinist, Catholic convert, Dreyfusist, and religious poet, Péguy truly lived the various facets of the history of his own time.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 477.

<sup>7</sup>Suares, Péguy, pp. 33-34.

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