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"THE FAITH I LOVE BEST IS HOPE"
Perspectives of Hope from Charles Péguy

The young girl, Hope, leads the more august pair of Faith and Charity into the light. For Péguy, Hope is also playful and energetic; it is a lively connection to that idea of the real, 'le reel,' that keeps our eyes open, like a watchman's, even when we have first found Faith and Charity. It is linked to joy. It can happen that a form of religion takes root where Faith and Charity have become established habits, but the playful alertness of hope, like that of a little child, has dried up. Religion can become just a system.

> The faith that I love best, says God, is hope. Faith doesn't surprise me. It's not surprising. I am so resplendent in my creation…. That in order not to see me these poor people would have to be blind. Charity, says God, that doesn't surprise me. It's not surprising. These poor creatures are so miserable that unless they had a heart of stone, how could they not have love for each other … But hope, says God, that is something that surprises me. Even me. That is surprising.
>
> Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of the Second Virtue*

AN UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCE OF HOPE

For the ancient Greeks hope, or *elpis*, was a kind of blind trust in an unknown future; the idea that everything would turn out well in the end, even if such an attitude was in vain. This was what was left for Pandora, in Hesiod's tale, after she had opened the forbidden box, or rather jar. It was a cruel trick of the gods. Later, and especially among renaissance scholars, there was the interpretation with which moderns are more familiar: hope was a kind of divine blessing for the unfortunate Pandora. In the 16th century, Andrea Alciato in his *Emblemata*[1] and Gabriele Faerno in his *Centum Fabulae*[2] both saw hope as a kind of happy consolation, but should *elpis* in fact be viewed as an evil, just like all the others in the jar that escaped before it? That is how Hesiod and

[1] See, e.g., Andrea A l c i a t o, *Emblemata* (Lugdunum: Mathias Bonhomme, 1550), http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/books.php?id=A50a&o=.

[2] See *Centum fabulae ex antiquis auctoribus delectae, et a Gabriele Faerno Cremonensi carminibus explicatae* (Antverpia: Christophe Plantin, 1567), https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_zXMe9nf1plkC/page/n5/mode/2up.

most of his contemporaries saw it. Could hope be evil precisely because blind optimism leads man to ignore the true desperation of his state? If not evil, then at least, for modern man, *absurd*? It is a perennial question, and the answer to it rather depends on one's view of God and religion.

Of course, in one sense, questions of hope defy reason; it always depends on whether one wants to see things positively or negatively. Some people are hopeful, some are not; even if all of them are, in a profound sense, *hopeless*. In the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, however, Hope assumes not just a moral quality but also a definite end goal: the *beata spes* of the Mass, referring to life in Heaven and the enjoyment of the beatific vision of God. This kind of Hope makes a difference to our life and behaviour now, and in the future. Hope, together with Faith and Charity (Love), is one of the three theological virtues in Christian theology. It unites in one habit of mind the desire for a particular good together with the expectation of receiving it. To be precise—it is the virtue that looks forward to union with God and its accompanying eternal beatitude. St. Thomas writes that while Faith is a function of the intellect, Hope is an act of the will. In fact, he talks about two kinds of hope: first in his discussion of the "passions … common to man and other animals,"[3] and later as one of the theological virtues. We can share with a dog the hope of a treat for good behaviour, for example. For both man and dog, "hope is a movement of the appetitive power ensuing from the apprehension of a future good, difficult but possible to obtain."[4] In its theological dimension, Hope has three distinct attributes: God is its object, it is God who infuses it in us, and it is he also who reveals it to us in Sacred Scripture.[5] So, as with happiness, there is a certain kind of hope that can be obtained by our own powers but whose perfection is only possible through divine grace. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: "Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit."[6] Yet, it adds that although the theological virtue of Hope depends entirely on God, it does in fact respond to something which already exists within our very nature—"to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man."[7]

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[3] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 24, a. 1, trans. Laurence Shapcote, https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.I-II.

[4] Ibidem, q. 40, a. 2. Although perhaps it could be observed that the philosophy of mind has progressed a great deal since Aquinas, and that while a dog might be limited to Pavlovian responses, man has—unlike dogs—a real concept of the future. Man's hopefulness has more to do with looking towards that future than with a vague state of readiness or expectation.

[5] See ibidem, I-II, q. 62, a. 1.

[6] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 1817, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

[7] Ibidem, § 1818.

Perhaps we can say then that although Christian Hope springs from Faith in Christ and trust in his promises and is an infused gift of God, a certain kind of hope is already present in those who are seeking God and who are open to the gift of Faith. This is a fruit of that *prevenient grace*, portrayed by Cardinal Charles Journet as an arrow aimed by God at his beloved creatures[8]: the "quickening and assisting grace"[9] already explored by the Council of Trent. Perhaps it could be possible to say, in the light of this, that nobody is beyond hope, or to put it differently: anyone may be permitted to hope. Perhaps, for many, it is a good place to start—it is like a little child, holding out its hand to us. How can one refuse it? In all our definitions of hope, we have not yet mentioned what might be considered as Hope's opposite: despair. For modern man, the temptation to give in, to end it all, is an ever more pressing question. And yet, for most of us, we do not give up; and it is more than an animal survival instinct, even if that is part of it; it is more than a reaction against our fear of the unknown after death, Hamlet's "undiscover'd country, from whose bourn no traveller returns"[10]; it is because God's arrow is not far away, ready to wound us and win us. And the tip of that arrow is surely Hope. Is this view of Hope in fact too presumptuous, too optimistic, even too hopeful?

Above, some attempts to define what hope is and what it is not were mentioned. In the lived reality of our relationship with God it is ultimately more important to *experience* hope that it is to *define* it. Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* invited us to "a renewed appreciation of the theological virtue of hope…. The basic attitude of hope, on the one hand encourages the Christian not to lose sight of the final goal which gives meaning and value to life, and on the other, offers solid and profound reasons for a daily commitment to transform reality in order to make it correspond to God's plan."[11] For the recently canonised John Henry Newman, Hope is about watching and waiting: "The Lord has come and gone; and now we wait," [12] as he wrote in his poem "Hope." But this Hope, or a close relative of it, is a free gift, inscribed on the hearts of all men. For Newman, "such is the definition … of every religious man, who has not the knowledge of Christ; he

[8] See Charles J o u r n e t, The Meaning of Grace (New York: Deus Books, 1962), 36.

[9] See The Council of Trent, *On Justification: First Decree*, Session 6, Chapter 5, http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch6.htm.

[10] William S h a k e s p e a r e, *Hamlet*, *prince of Denmark*, Act 3, Scene 1.

[11] J o h n P a u l II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, Section 46, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19941110_tertio-millennio-adveniente.html.

[12] John Henry N e w m a n, "Hope," quoted in Barb H. Wyman, "Hope of Heaven," https://www.cardinaljohnhenrynewman.com/hope-of-heaven/.

is on the look-out."[13] Hope, somehow, is already inscribed on men's hearts in anticipation of the gift of Faith. She is like the arrow of predestination envisaged by Cardinal Journet, shot from God's bow, seeking out every human soul. But once the gift of Faith is explicitly welcomed, that Hope assumes a new force and a new urgency: as Newman teaches, "We are not simply to believe, but to watch; not simply to love, but to watch; not simply to obey, but to watch; to watch for what? for that great event, Christ's coming."[14]

An author who considered the issue was Charles Péguy. For him the virtue of Hope is possible even when the light of faith has grown very dim; like a little child, Hope leads us by the hand, and leads the tired pair of Faith and Love onward, looking forward to our bright future in Heaven.

CHARLES PIERRE PÉGUY AND HIS TIME

Charles Pierre Péguy was born on January 7, 1873, in Orléans, France, and died on the battlefield on September 5, 1914, at Villeroy, at the very beginning of the First World War. He was a French writer, poet, essayist and reserve military officer. His works include medieval-inspired *mysteries* in free verse, of which his famous text about Hope, "Le Porche de la deuxième vertu,"[15] [*The Portal of the Mystery of the Second Virtue*[16]] (originally published in 1911), is one. He also published collections of more conventional verse poems, such as *La Tapisserie de Notre Dame*[17] [The Tapestry of Our Lady] of 1913, also of mystical inspiration, focused on St. Joan of Arc, very much a patriotic symbol for a France undergoing difficult times. In the context of the stormy French fin de siècle, he was a committed intellectual: first a libertarian socialist activist, attracted to anti-clericalism, and an outspoken *Dreyfusard* during his studies, he moved from 1908 towards a nationalistic and medievalist Catholicism. A common theme throughout his poetry is a preoccupation with social justice as well as a kind of despair about the modern world. In this, and in some other respects, he prefigures the much better-known Albert Camus, who in 1942, in his *Myth of Sisyphus*, observes man's eternal optimism and his search for

[13] John Henry N e w m a n, *Sermon 5: Dispositions for Faith*, in John Henry Newman, "Sermons Preached on Various Occasions," http://www.newmanreader.org/works/occasions/sermon5.html.

[14] John Henry N e w m a n, *Parochial & Plain Sermons 4, Sermon 22: Watching*, http://www.newmanreader.org/works/parochial/volume4/sermon22.html.

[15] See Charles P é g u y, "Le Porche de la deuxième vertu," in *Œuvres complètes de Charles Péguy*, vol. 5 (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue française, 1916).

[16] See Charles P é g u y, *The Portal of the Mystery of the Second Virtue*, trans. David Louis Schindler Jr (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996).

[17] See Charles P é g u y, *La Tapisserie de Notre Dame* (Paris: Cahiers de la quinzaine, 1913).

meaning to his travail. Camus recalls the punishment of the gods meted out to Sisyphus for attempting to free men from death: he is condemned to roll a boulder up to the top of a hill only to see it fall down again, before he hopefully rolls it back up again, over and over again, for all eternity.[18] For Camus, with his philosophy of the absurdity of life, there is no hope and no meaning to this existence of ours; hence the mantra of his hopeless hero, Meursault, in his 1942 novel *L'Étranger* (usually rendered as *The Stranger*: "Cela ne veut rien dire"[19] ("That doesn't mean anything"[20]). All those who hope are roundly ridiculed in this absurdist gospel that ends with the banal execution of its rather autistic messiah.

With Péguy, though, suffering humanity seeks meaning and hope, and finds them in the promises of Christ, re-clothed in all their Gospel freshness and authenticity by the engaging voice of a child. The enduring impression one has of Péguy is of a man of Faith who combined a revolutionary spirit with a counter-revolutionary one, motivated by a very raw and human love and concern for other human beings and their fate. Of course, this produced tensions within him, not least in the practice of his Faith; before his death, he is known to have abstained from Holy Communion for several years over his difficulty with the doctrine of eternal punishment for sinners. With him, in fact, his instinct to hope was so deep, so simple and so single-minded that he could not believe anyone could ever be beyond it.

Before providing some highlights from Péguy's great hymn to Hope, I will explore the context into which he was born: a divided and hopeless culture, exasperated by its institutions, torn between religion and science and prone to extreme and polarising tendencies. France at that time had a great deal in common with our own time and perhaps that is why a voice such as Péguy's seems again so pertinent and is being taken up again by all kinds of people from differing perspectives. Even today he is claimed by both the right and the left. Considering Péguy's concern with the sufferings and dignity of the poor, the importance of roots and tradition, the Catholic faith—as also the mistrust he felt about systems, hierarchy and clericalism—it is no wonder that, humanly concerned, he felt dismay in the early 1900s at the prospects of France. And things were only to get worse in the thirty years following his death. It is this context of a divided and partisan society which accounts at least in part for the way in which it took unclassifiable figures hostile to vested interests, such as Péguy, Léon Bloy, Arthur Rimbaud, and indeed Camus (not all of them

[18] See Albert C a m u s, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin, 2013).

[19] Albert C a m u s, *L'Étranger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).

[20] Albert C a m u s, *The Stranger*, trans. Matthew Ward (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 3.

Catholic or fully Catholic, and each of them a severe critic of the Catholic and secular establishments), to reach so many future converts from different sectors of a disturbed and divided culture and provide them with bridges back to faith.[21]

The fact that two men, seem both keenly aware of the hopelessness of the human condition, perhaps especially as experienced in their French context, begs the question: where does this sense of ennui come from? Why is it so characteristic of France at the end of nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries? A quick and easy answer would be that it was all part of the fallout of the French Revolution; and it is true enough that nothing was ever the same again in France, or in the world, after that event. But the specific feeling of 'ennui' and the resultant desperate search for meaning is something very characteristic of this period, beginning a century after the Revolution. There was of course, shame from the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War, a feeling that no doubt fed extreme nationalist sentiments; there was also a certain sadness and apprehension as the champions of scientific progress seemed to be banishing religion from serious public consideration. And yet in the midst of all of this there were convert scientists such as Ferdinand Brunetière (editor of the renowned *Revue des Deux Mondes* and author, in 1895, of the explosive *Science and Religion*[22]), as well as pious and productive academics such as Louis Pasteur, together with the whole host of decadent poets on both sides of the English channel who in considerable numbers returned, one by one, to historic Christianity when it seemed a lost cause. The evidence of this 'ennui,' and its relationship to what can be called 'the Catholic movement' are worth examining in three particular fields: the political situation of France at that time, that of the literary men who chronicled the feeling of malaise and lived it out in their decadent lives, and lastly those philosophers and poets who could be counted 'activists,' seeking a real world solution to the impasse of national despair.

French politics in this period was riddled with tensions and scandals. A large part (especially amongst Catholics and proletarians) of the French public was radically out of sympathy with the aggressively anti-clerical government, which had only come to power through military intervention and bloody reprisals against the Communards and subterfuge (through the 1870s) against the Royalists. Scandal after scandal involving these and other tensions continued to shake the Republic to its foundations (right through to 1840):

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[21] See Frédéric G u g e l o t, *La Conversion des intellectuels au catholicisme en France [1885-1935]* (Paris: CNRS, 2010), 5ff.

[22] See Ferdinand B r u n e t i è r e, *Science and Religion*, trans. Erik Butler (Les Brouzils: Odd Volumes, 2016).

the Boulanger crisis (1889), the Panama scandal (1892), the Fashoda incident (1898), above all the Dreyfus case (1894–1906). In the midst of the Dreyfus case came the anti-clerical crisis of 1905, in which Pope Pius X himself was forced to intervene. The previous pope (Leo XIII) had urged French Catholics to accept the Republic (at least pragmatically) in order to be accepted in turn, but French political society was so deeply divided that neither the Catholics nor the anti-Clericals were inclined in the least to listen. The socialist movement continued to grow under the leadership of Jean Jaurès—but Péguy became disillusioned with him and broke with the movement. Many of these problems stemmed from the disastrous events of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and its even more disastrous aftermath, with the loss of Alsace-Lorraine provoking an enduring revenge mentality that affected French politics domestically and throughout the Empire. And so the whole country was divided in an increasingly powder keg atmosphere, nowhere perhaps better illustrated than in the Dreyfus case: the anti-Dreyfusards included agnostic nationalists like Charles Maurras, sophisticated agnostics like Paul Valéry and Saint-Saëns, military men, and large numbers of Catholics fearful of the leftist attack on the conservative and mostly Catholic-friendly army. Pro-Dreyfusards included such unlikely bedfellows as Péguy and the essentially bourgeois, determinedly anti-Catholic Émile Zola.

The so-called decadent movement was a kind of chronicle of the listless nature of fin de siècle France as well as a reaction to it. Key precursors and influences here were Charles Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine and Charles-Marie-Georges Huysmans.[23] 'Ennui' and 'spleen' are central to Baudelaire's poems,[24] but Baudelaire linked them to the sinful condition of man. His solution was ultimately Catholic, with its love of beauty, truth,[25] and order.[26] He was initially prepared to take whatever measures were necessary to achieve visionary intensity for his poems. Later, however, his revulsion at the falseness of narcotically enhanced experience, and fear for his soul, led him to condemn these experiments in the strongest terms: "Any man who does not accept the conditions of this life, sells his soul."[27]

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[23] Huysmans published his works as Joris-Karl Huysmans.

[24] The word 'ennui' appears over twenty times in *Fleurs du Mal*, while the poet named a whole section of the book "Spleen et idéal." See Charles B a u d e l a i r e, *Fleurs du mal / Flowers of Evil*, https://fleursdumal.org/.

[25] See Enid S t a r k i e, *Arthur Rimbaud* (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), 116.

[26] "There all is order and beauty/Luxury, peace, and pleasure." Charles B a u d e l a i r e, "Invitation to the Voyage," in Charles Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal / Flowers of Evil*, https://fleursdumal.org/poem/148. See also Thomas Stearns E l i o t, "Baudelaire in Our Time," in Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Essays Ancient and Modern* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company), 1936.

[27] Charles B a u d e l a i re, "Morale," in *Les Paradis artificiels*, quoted in Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud*, 117.

The youthful Rimbaud idolised Baudelaire and agreed with his analysis of Man's condition.[28] His solution was to achieve personal transcendence and illumination through a systematic disordering of the senses. In a letter to Georges Isambard from 13 May, 1871, he wrote: "Now, I am degrading myself as much as possible. Why? I want to be a poet, and I am working to make myself a seer: you will not understand this, and I don't know how to explain it to you. It is a questioning of reaching the unknown by the derangement of all the senses. The sufferings are enormous."[29] Unlike Baudelaire, he was prepared to gamble with his soul and his very identity in this venture. Whether or not we accept the account of his deathbed conversion, he came to the conclusion that he had failed. He could rid himself neither of the sense of sin, nor of the necessity—to him at least—of God. As Starkie comments, "The three principal *leitmotifs* in *Une Saison en enfer* are the problem of sin, the problem of God—his personal need to believe in God—and finally the problem of life, the acceptance of life."[30] So he abandoned poetry in disgust as futile and—in order to salvage his health and sanity—pursued a life of action in Africa.

Verlaine led a completely dissolute life; he produced a body of verse which—in subject and manner—reflected this, and whose influence on the later 19th century was second only to Baudelaire's. Both Rimbaud and the pre-conversion Verlaine were anti-Bourgeois, anti-clerical radicals whose political and social positions were either passively (Verlaine) or actively (Rimbaud) destructive. Their reactions to *metanoia* (religious in Verlaine's case, aesthetic / existential in Rimbaud's) involved no creative or dynamic engagement with the culture: Rimbaud was an enthusiastic supporter of the Commune of 1871; the failure of his apocalyptic political visions was a factor in his abandonment of France and indeed of the whole western world. Verlaine's response was religiously inspired poetry. Both had an impact (Rimbaud through *Saison en enfer*[31] and *Illuminations*[32]) on the Catholic poets of the fin de siècle, but neither man's work nor reaction involved constructive local social engagement. The same can be said of the somewhat later case of Huysmans: his important decadent novel *À rebours*[33]—and its succeeding Durtal tetralogy[34]—illustrated

[28] See S t a r k i e, *Arthur Rimbaud*, 111−8.

[29] Arthur R i m b a u d, "The Seer Letter # 1," https://rimbaudanalysis.wordpress.com/letters/.

[30] See S t a r k i e, *Arthur Rimbaud*, 289f.

[31] See Arthur R i m b a u d, *Une Saison en enfer* (Bruxelles: Alliance typographique (M.-J. Poot et compagnie), 1873).

[32] See Arthur R i m b a u d, *Illuminations* (Paris: Publications de la Vogue, 1886).

[33] See Joris-Karl H u y s m a n s, *À rebours* (Paris: G. Charpentier et Cie, 1884).

[34] See Joris-Karl H u y s m a n s, *Là-Bas* (Paris: Tresse & Stock, Éditeurs, 1891); Joris-Karl H u y s m a n s, *En route* (Paris: Tresse & Stock, Éditeurs, 1895); Joris-Karl H u y s m a n s, *La Cathédrale* (Paris: P.-V. Stock, Éditeur, 1898); Joris-Karl H u y s m a n s, *L'Oblat* (Paris: P.-V. Stock, Éditeur, 1903).

the suffocating ennui produced by hyper-sophisticated modern civilisation on a sensitive mind and the appeal of conversion to Catholicism as a solution; but the author's (and his hero's) specific solution was retreat from society into quasi-monastic life. With all these decadent men, the lack of apparent connection with humanity at large might lead one to accuse them of being self-obsessed.

But a few years later, there were men who proposed socio-political solutions, men who were outward looking and earnest. There were especially the 'outrageous,' anti-social challenges of Barbey d'Aurevilly and his (one time) disciple Bloy. The work of both men involved savage indictments of modern life and pessimistic (though anti-Jansenistic) analyses of human nature. Politically Barbey was an ultra-traditionalist/reactionary, while Bloy was a sign of contradiction to any kind of compromise with ordinary life; and Bloy's condemnation of the generality of contemporary Catholic clergy and Catholic activism and literature was as vitriolic as his view of secular society. *Action Française*—founded in 1898—was a reactionary movement and journal dedicated, under the leadership of the influential intellectual Charles Maurras, to restoring the king and the Catholic Church's central position in French life. It was particularly hostile to influential minorities—like the Jews—perceived as unassimilable and inimical to traditional French identity. Many Catholics and intellectuals critical of the Third Republic (or aspects of its culture) flocked to support it.

In an age of panicky extremes, and faced with the same set of problems, Péguy took another path altogether. He was not at home with the leaders of this movement: "For me, Bloy, Huysmans and … Barbey d'Aurevilly. They are antipathetic to me. As far as I'm concerned, they are pornographers."[35] As for Péguy and his relationship with this recent Catholic-literary patrimony, it is safe to say that he resembles his great precursors in certain individual respects: in Baudelaire's ultimate conviction of the primacy of human nature as a union of body and soul; in Rimbaud's instrumentalising of poetry for higher purposes; in Verlaine's writing specifically Catholic poetry in response to crisis; in Barbey d'Aurevilly's flaying of sectarian secularism; in Bloy's uncompromising independence of faction, including 'official' Catholic ones, and his mystical view of France and history; in *Action Française*'s (and even the more or less Catholic Republican Maurice Barres's) cult of St. Joan of Arc. So Péguy was combining and revisiting many themes already explored by the literary world of the fin de siècle.

Finally, the philosophical influence of Henri Bergson (1859−1941) must not be overlooked. This Jewish philosopher, active in the early 1900s, advo-

[35] Quoted after Stanislas F u m e t, *Histoire de Dieu dans ma vie* (Paris: Fayard, 1978).

cated what became known as realism which was in part a reaction against the perceived disconnection between academic philosophy and everyday lived experience. Péguy first heard Bergson's lectures when a student at the École normale supérieure where he became a devotee, even going to the trouble of transcribing Bergson's lectures and publishing them. Although their thinking later diverged, in those early days, the influence was not all one way: Bergson even admitted that Péguy seemed to have understood what he (Bergson) was thinking before he actually found a way of expressing it.[36] Part of this notion of the real meant a certain kind of permission given to the emotions, to human feeling. In his *Note sur M. Bergson et la Philosophie Bergsonienne*,[37] Péguy asserts that the passions are not inferior to the intellect, as long as those passions are noble. In simple terms, perhaps one could say that the voice of experience and the voice of the heart find their way back into a philosophical discourse hitherto overwhelmed under the weight of logic. As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's little prince would say a generation later: "This is my secret. It is very simple: one only sees well with the heart. What is truly real (*l'essentiel*) is invisible to the eyes."[38] In his work, Péguy took this idea further than Bergson himself did, perhaps because he was more poet than philosopher.

It is this commitment to what one might call an incarnational intellectualism (linked to real people and real feelings) that causes Péguy, for all his reputed mysticism, to be committed to the hilt to engaging with the great social implications of Catholicism and France (and the people of France)—particularly in *hoping* and, as it were, mystically *seeing* an eventual resolution to the endless conflicts and factions tearing his country apart. And perhaps we can conclude that, in some measure, he succeeded, as—unusually in so faction-riven a country as France has been since the Revolution—Péguy has been claimed by virtually every party as one of their own.

"THE LITTLE GIRL HOPE"

Péguy's epic treatment of Hope takes the form of a strange monologue called *Le Porche du mystère de la deuxième vertu*, or *Portal of the Mystery of the Second Virtue*, in which St. Joan of Arc is receiving a long catechism lesson, framed as a dramatic monologue, from a Franciscan nun called Mad-

[36] See A. E. P i l k i n g t o n, *Bergson and His Influence: A Reassessment*, Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1976, 95–8.

[37] See Charles P é g u y, *Note sur M. Bergson et la philosophie bergsonienne*, http://obvil.sorbonne-universite.site/corpus/critique/peguy_note-bergson.

[38] Antoine d e S a i n t - E x u p é r y, *Le Petit prince* (Paris: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1943), 83. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

ame Gervaise. The idea of the medieval porch of a French cathedral makes one think of the medieval mystery plays that were presented under them, but also of those busy carved scenes, so full of saints and allegories, very much giving a tangible aspect to the truths of faith, and often characterised by those arresting but serene smiles of the saints and of our Lady. The tangible, the real, was, as we have seen, something very central for Péguy, very much influenced by the early works of Bergson, who sought to create "a metaphysic which ... aimed to reveal the *réel* (the real) and thus was endowed with an 'organic force' permitting it to be related to life in all sorts of new and fruitful ways which are impossible in the case of a logically self-contained system, which contents itself with being merely *'vrai'* (true), that is, put together in such a way as to satisfy the intellect."[39] For Péguy, the discipleship of the *réel* is also, and preeminently, incarnational, so that he has been hailed as the poet who *enshrined the incarnate word*.

In the *Portal*, Madame Gervaise presents to the young St. Joan the idea that Hope has perhaps been too overshadowed by Faith and Charity. There is even the idea that Hope is almost more accessible and more 'friendly' for the agnostic or the seeker, and that it can, by God's grace, lead us to the fullness of Faith. If one were to speak of a 'temporal procession' of the theological virtues, Hope can be seen as coming first, even if without at least implicit Faith it would be impossible. The perspectives of the convert and the sinner are naturally turned to the last things, as much through fear as through hope: and this perspective needs to be restored to the Christian life, to cure us all of sentimentalism, ritualism, or activism, all of which are extremes into which a Christian can fall when he forgets the object of our hope, to be forever one with Christ in the beatific vision.

Madame Gervaise, with her lessons of catechism, her reminiscences of things that a friendly, almost avuncular God the Father has said to her—in fact the main voice that speaks throughout the poem is God's, through her—her visions, her tales of the saints, is addressing the young girl who will one day awaken France from its slumber and call it back to faith and action. It is clear that Péguy is also thereby addressing the Frenchmen of the early twentieth century who seem to have lost hope in the vocation of their country, to have lost hope in God's promises, to have lost energy and direction. Here is how Péguy describes the three theological virtues:

> For my three virtues, said God.
> The three virtues my creatures.
> My daughters, my children.

[39] P i l k i n g t o n, *Bergson and His Influence: A Reassessment*, 83.

> Are themselves like my other creatures.
> Of the race of men.
> Faith is a loyal Wife.
> Charity is a Mother.
> A loving mother, all heart. Or an elder sister who is like a mother.
> Hope is a little slip of a girl.[40]

In Péguy's poem we see that perhaps when Christ says "unless you become like this child," He is giving us a teaching about hope, illustrated by the hope that lights up the face of every child, something which never ceases to move me as a school teacher, when I see it, and which in Péguy's vision even seems to surprise God Himself:

> That these poor children see how things are going
> and believe tomorrow things will go better.
> That they see how things are going today
> and believe they will go better tomorrow morning.
> That is surprising and it's by far the greatest marvel of our grace.
> And I'm surprised by it myself.[41]

Thus, for Péguy, even God is surprised at the power of Hope:

> What surprises me, says God, is hope.
> And I can't get over it.
> This little hope who seems like nothing at all.
> This little girl hope.[42]

The young girl, Hope, leads the more august pair of Faith and Charity into the light: "And a little child shall lead them" (Is 11:6). We indicated above Newman's image of Hope as a watchman whose desire for a better life keeps him alert. But for Péguy, Hope is also playful and energetic; it is a lively connection to that idea of the real, *lé reel*, that keeps our eyes open, like a watchman's, even when we have first found Faith and Charity. It is linked to joy. The child remains joyful. The adult is tired, and needs, as Clive S. Lewis was, to be "surprised by joy."[43] It can happen that a form of religion takes root where Faith and Charity have become established habits, but the playful alertness of hope, like that of a little child, has dried up. Religion can become just a system. And in this way, whilst materialists (whether Communists or Capitalists) live

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[40] Charles P é g u y, "Le Porche de la deuxième vertu," 264.

[41] Ibidem, 262.

[42] Ibidem, 263.

[43] Clive S. L e w i s, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2017).

by a physical mechanism, the scholastics can end up promoting little more than a spiritual mechanism. For Péguy, even Holy Mother Church can be entombed by "the rigidity of her bureaucracy."[44] The great twentieth century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar saw in Péguy "precisely the same polemic against the spirit of systematization that Kierkegaard conducted against Hegelianism."[45] That way of thinking can itself go too far—after all men like St. Thomas and St. Anselm were monks and great contemplatives and their "systematisation" perhaps sprang from profound intuitions of the divinely ordained beauty and order in all things. On the other hand those who sought later to package the early schoolmen in concise manuals for easy consumption in seminaries might more accurately reflect a bureaucratic tendency. And so it was that men such as Henri de Lubac and von Balthasar who, before and after Vatican II, underlined a need for a 'ressourcement,' a rejuvenating drink from the springs of tradition, before any thought of 'aggiornamento.' These men sensed, like Péguy before them, the tiredness of Hope's venerable guardians. In the need for a certain refreshment of our initial joy in the Lord, there are, philosophically, echoes of Kierkegaard's 'repetition'[46] or Heidegger's 'retrieval' (*Wiederholung*)[47] but without the difficulty of abstraction. Because for Péguy, Hope is a little girl, and as the God of Péguy's poem says: "Children are more my creatures than men are." Péguy's God suggests that perhaps every child is an icon of Hope.

Hope became for Péguy a central preoccupation, as *amore* had been for Dante. As Dante's childhood darling Beatrice, an embodiment of pure love, was his guide to the mysteries of God, so with Péguy, the little girl Hope, based on his own daughter Germaine, who was then nine years' old, was the key to a deeper acceptance of the Faith. In fact, perhaps without the inspiration of his children, and this intuition about hope which they gave him, Péguy might never have made the ultimate submission (with confession and Holy Communion) that he made a couple of weeks before his death in battle. For several years, he had been openly Catholic, in a climate of widespread anti-clericalism, even if he had quietly held back on full assent to Catholic teaching as has been mentioned above, due to certain theological difficulties. His conversion story is very much in the context of the *fin de siècle* literary scene in England and

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[44] Charles P é g u y, *Note conjointe sur M. Descartes et la philosophie cartésienne*, http://obvil.sorbonne-universite.site/corpus/critique/peguy_note-descartes/.

[45] Hans Urs v o n B a l t h a s a r, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aestetics*, vol. 3, *Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, John Saward, Martin Simon, and Rowan Williams, ed. John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 422.

[46] See Søren K i e r k e g a a r d, "Repetition," trans. Howard W. Hong and Edna W. Hong, in Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Repetition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[47] See Martin H e i d e g g e r, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambough, revised by Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

France, where intellectuals, in considerable numbers, rejected anti-Catholicism and scientism in favour of a return to religion.

He also had a particular reason to connect childhood and hope. In 1911, his youngest child, Pierre, fell dangerously ill. Péguy set off on a pilgrimage to Chartres. He marched alone, on foot, eighty kilometres a day. "He prayed to Our Lady. He did not ask her to cure his child. That was her affair. He was a busy man. He had an office and a thousand cares. He simply gave the child to her, all his children. The boy was cured. 'Of course,' was Peguy's only comment on the cure."[48] Although he said little about it, this episode marked him profoundly.

Shortly before his death in battle in September 1914, he began (but did not finish) his *Note Conjointe sur M. Descartes et la philosophie cartésienne* in which he explains that in *The Portal of the Mystery of the Second Virtue*,

> the meaning and the strength and the vocation and, so to speak, the virtue of the one we have named the young child Esperance (Hope) burst on to the scene. She is the source of life, because she is the one who constantly *undoes habits*. She is the seed of all spiritual birth. She is the source and the overflowing of grace, for she is the one who constantly strips us of this mortal clothing of *habit*. And it is not in vain that she is theological. Because she is the child princess of the Theological Virtues. And she is the Dauphine and daughter of France. And it is not in vain that she walks in the middle between her two big sisters and that her two big sisters give her their hand. But they do not give her their hand in the sense that we believe. Because she is small, she is believed to need others. To walk. But it is the others on the contrary who need it. And who are happy to give her their hand. To walk. For Faith without her would have grown too accustomed to this world and without her Charity would have grown too accustomed to the poor man. And so Faith without her and Charity without her would each have gotten too accustomed, even to God Himself.[49]

Here Péguy sees the little girl Hope as

> …charged with constantly upsetting our habits. She is charged with always beginning afresh. She is charged with everywhere bringing about beginnings, just as habit brings about everywhere endings and deaths. She is charged with bringing about *organisms* whereas habit brings about everywhere *mechanisms*. She is the principle, this child is the principle of *recreation* where habit is the principle of *decreation*.… She is the ever-young agent of creation and grace…. The two others (Faith and Charity) have their distinct function, but without her, who has no distinct function, the distinct functions of the two others would gradually get bogged down and enslaved to habit.[50]

We may reasonably be concerned by Péguy's opposition between habit and creativity but should not read into it a criticism of the forging of good

[48] See Catriona M a c L e o d, "Charles Peguy (1873–1914)," *The Irish Monthly* 65, no. 770 (1937), 536.

[49] P é g u y, *Note conjointe sur M. Descartes et la philosophie cartésienne*.

[50] Ibidem.

habits and character. Péguy, always an honest *paysan* (countryman) at heart, would not fall into that rarified way of thinking. Rather, in *The Portal*, the four Cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice) are represented as the four sturdy legs of a Lorraine carthorse, pulling a plough that represents our relationship with God, based on Faith, Hope, and Charity.

> This plough behind it ploughs the land of Lorraine.
> (But ploughs it on one condition: that one should also pull *it* along).
> Like the plough-horse, the good animal must not only carry and move itself,
> On its four legs, on its four feet,
> But together must drag this plough which, thus animated behind it, ploughs the earth.
> And so it is with the soul, this beast of burden,
> In an earthly plowing, a carnal plowing.
> Not only must the soul move and be carried along by the four virtues,
> pulling and dragging itself,
> But it must also draw and that it drag
> This body sunk in the earth which plows behind her the soil of the earth.[51]

Here we see that for Péguy anything that is true is only absolutely real when incarnated, or *inserted*, into the concrete tangibility of things: in this case in the work of the sturdy horse on its four legs. Could one allow the symbolism to take one a little further, in the spirit of the philosophy of the *réel*? Are not the four cardinal virtues reminiscent of the four cardinal points and the four Aristotelian elements, clear signs of the *réel*, our rootedness in the material world? And does not the trio of Faith, Hope, and Charity, make us think of the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, where a poetical metaphysic will allow these virtues to elucidate truths about each Person of the Blessed Trinity? We have seen that Péguy's voice of God, who speaks as God the Father and associates Faith with the evidence of the Creator's work in the world, and evokes the example of Love offered by His Son; although neither Péguy, nor Péguy's voice of God, speaking through Madame Gervaise, says as much, all the signs are there that Hope should make us think of the Holy Spirit, whom we constantly beseech "to renew the face of the earth." This hymn to Hope is surely also a hymn to the Holy Spirit, whom we implore to refresh us and remake us: "Without your spirit, there is nothing in man, nothing that is not harmful. Cleanse that which is unclean, water that which is dry, heal that which is wounded. Bend that which is inflexible, fire that which is chilled, correct what goes astray."[52] Can we not then say that just as the "little girl" Hope renews her guardians, Faith and Charity, so it is the Holy Spirit that renews

[51] P é g u y, "Le Porche de la deuxième vertu," 328.

[52] The hymn *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, from the Roman Missal, attributed to Pope Innocent III or to Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury.

our devotion to the Father and the Son, interceding from within us "in sighs too deep for words"?

I draw attention to two more (out of many) aspects of hope as portrayed by Péguy in this masterpiece. First, the way in which Péguy's (or perhaps Madame Gervaise's) very folksy representation of God is Himself able to be hopeful, and therefore somehow to draw us into His own hope through a very human power of attraction. At the end of the poem, God is represented as praising the way in which children understand that night is best, because that is when God is in charge. And yet adults refuse to sleep, failing to place their trust in God. God hopes that the fulfilment of the age will come soon. Here, as throughout *The Portal*, the voice of God is redolent of the beautiful mythic naivety of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in *Le Petit prince*:

> You tell me of the great silence there will be
> After the end of the reign of man,
> When I will take up my sceptre once more.
> And sometimes I look forward to that,
> Because this man really makes a lot of noise.[53]

And the poem ends with God's humble expression of gratitude to "lady night" for having covered the descent from the Cross and the burial of Christ with a veil of darkness.

The lasting impression, however, of "the little girl Hope", is of her playfulness and a certain unpredictability. Péguy tells of a playful God, of a playful believer and perhaps looks forward to a playful Church, whose heart is constantly rejuvenated by Hope.

> For children, playing, working, resting, stopping, running, are all one.
> All the same. Are all the same thing. They make no distinction.
> They are happy. They enjoy themselves all the time.
> As much when they are working as when they are playing.
> They do not even notice. They are very happy.
> ...Hope also is she who enjoys herself all the time.[54]

But this joy is grounded. It is not a merely terrestrial joy that masks despair and tragedy, and is ultimately terrified of death. It looks forward, as we have said before, to the joys of Heaven. In fact, when we read Péguy, we come to see that this playful and childlike joy is true and real, only if reality gives us a real reason to hope. Gilbert K. Chesterton, in many ways quite similar to

[53] P é g u y, *"Le Porche de la deuxième vertu,"* 453.
[54] Ibidem, 294.

Péguy, once wrote that "if we are to be truly gay, we must believe that there is some eternal gaiety in the nature of things."[55]

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In keeping with the intuition of St. John Paul II, who boldly asserted: "we wish to proclaim that apart from *the mercy* of God there is no other source of *hope* for mankind,"[56] and of Pope Francis. We can observe that it is surely the centrality of Christ's mercy that is essential to this rediscovery of the virtue of Hope, for—as Newman claimed—God "is not only almighty but all-merciful also. Faith is founded on the knowledge that God is almighty, hope is founded on the knowledge that God is all merciful. The presence of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ excites us to hope quite as much as to faith, because His very name Jesus means Saviour, and because He was so loving, meek, and bountiful when He was on earth."[57] And it is the assurance of God's mercy which enabled French spirituality, perhaps overly coloured for centuries by the gloomy influence of Jansenism, and further wounded by the Revolution, to reject the pessimism of Vigny and the limitations of Pascal and to embrace the generous and expansive hope of Péguy. In our world today, no less fractured than that of 1914, if we Christians, as St. Peter invites us to do, would really "give an account of the hope that is in [us]" (1 Pt 3:15), then the world might at last return to Faith and Love, and be healed. The truth of God's mercy means that death need hold no fear for us, and the Hope we have received from Him should lighten our lives and give us joy. That message is as much waiting to be rediscovered in our age as it was in 1911.

The reality of death and the blessed hope of Heaven, which for the believer is every bit as *real*, should keep us always watchful, always cheerful, always child-like, like the ten wise virgins whose abundant store of oil symbolises the abundant hope in their hearts. The English Catholic poet, Alexander Pope (1688–1744), beautifully synthesises these comforting thoughts in these lines from his *Essay on Man*.

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[55] Gilbert K. C h e s t e r t o n, "Omar and the Sacred Vine," in Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (Radford: Wilder Publications, 2007), 44.

[56] J o h n P a u l II, Homily at Kraków-Łagiewniki, 17 August 2002, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20020817_shrine-divine-mercy.html.

[57] John Henry N e w m a n, "Sermon 1: The Omnipotence of God the Reason for Faith and Hope," in John Henry Newman, *Nine sermons,* http://www.newmanreader.org/works/ninesermons/sermon1.html.

Hope humbly then; with trembling pinions soar;
Wait the great teacher, Death; and God adore!
What future bliss, he gives not thee to know,
But gives that Hope to be thy blessing now.
Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
Man never is, but always to be blest;
The soul uneasy, and confin'd from home,
Rests, and expatiates, in a life to come.[58]

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[58] Alexander P o p e, *Essay on Man*, Epistle 1, https://www.eighteenthcenturypoetry.org/works/o3676-w0010.shtml.

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRACT

Ferdi McDERMOTT, "The faith I love best is hope": Perspectives of Hope from Charles Péguy

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Following calls from recent popes to a rediscovery of the theological virtue of hope, this paper examines a poem dealing specifically with that subject, by Charles Péguy, a French poet who died in 1914 in the early fighting of the First World War. He is a key figure of what has been called the French Catholic revival. His dramatic monologue takes the form of a catechism lesson addressed to the young St. Joan of Arc, in which Hope is portrayed as a little girl. Rooted in a rediscovery of the "real" and under the influence of the philosopher Bergson, Péguy's message seems to be that a childlike Hope could be the key to a renewal of Faith and Love, and perhaps to a re-energizing of the Christian message. Péguy wrote his poem at a time when France was deeply traumatized by the Franco-Prussian war, the Dreyfus scandal and the anti-clerical purge of the early 20th century. It was a society that had lost is bearings. Many themes of his day are strangely current in our own.

Keywords: Charles Péguy, Bergson, Mysteries, medievalism, suffering, hope, Joan of Arc, Charles Péguy, French Catholic revival

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Ferdi McDERMOTT, "Wiara, którą kocham najbardziej, to nadzieja". O perspektywie nadziei w ujęciu Charlesa Péguy'ego

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Odpowiadając na wezwanie współczesnych papieży zachęcających do ponownego odkrywania teologicznej cnoty nadziei, autor analizuje poemat Charlesa

Péguy'ego poświęcony właśnie tematyce nadziei. Péguy, francuski poeta, poległy w roku 1914, w czasie początkowych walk pierwszej wojny światowej, należał do najważniejszych postaci tak zwanego francuskiego odrodzenia katolickiego. W omawianym utworze, w którym poetycki monolog przeobraża się w lekcję katechizmu udzielaną młodej Joannie d'Arc, nadzieja ukazana została jako mała dziewczynka. Pod wpływem filozofii Henri'ego Bergsona i jego ponownego odkrycia „tego, co rzeczywiste", Péguy wskazuje nadzieję, uosobioną w postaci dziecka, jako klucz do odnowy wiary i miłości, a być może również źródło nowej energii dla przesłania, jakie niesie ze sobą chrześcijaństwo. Czas, w którym powstawał poemat – początek dwudziestego wieku – to we Francji okres kryzysu związanego z wojną francusko-pruską, sprawą Dreyfusa oraz czystkami antyklerykalnymi, a także głęboką dezorientacją społeczną. Wiele spośród poruszanych przez Péguy'ego ważnych wówczas tematów w zaskakujący sposób zachowuje aktualność również dzisiaj.

Słowa kluczowe: Charles Péguy, Henri Bergson, misteria, mediewalizm, cierpienie, nadzieja Joanna d'Arc, Charles Péguy, francuskie odrodzenie katolickie

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