

## CATHOLICS, COMMUNISTS AND ART SACRE

Sarah Wilson. \*Footnotes = pt of doc – check positions etc CHECK ALL

"Paris, ville-lumière, tu as donné ton nomme à l'école de l'imposture picassienne, à l'école de la corruption"

Cardinal Paul Scortesco: *Saint Picasso. Peignez pour nous*, 1953.1

Communist rhetoric in post-Liberation France defined itself increasingly between the poles of triumphalist and miserabilist discourses, reflected in the visual arts in a combination of modernist and socialist realist strategies after 1947, the year of the Party's expulsion from Government and Comintern directives. In very similar ways, right wing Catholicism, heir to the triumphalist conceptions of the Counter reformation was increasingly pressurised by the advances of the liturgical movement, supported by Pius XII's encyclical, 'Mediator-Dei' of 1947. A new conception of a 'pilgrim Church waiting for eschatological completion' accompanied a modernisation of the liturgy and necessary church-building and restoration. 2 This involved the employment of modernist artists, including committed communists, and was seen as a highly contentious gesture by many clerics and their congregations. It corresponded with the postwar continuation of the 'main tendue' policy of the communist leader Maurice Thorez. The Communist Party's desire to engage in an intellectual dialogue with the Church was problematic: at a cruder level it could be seen as a communist ploy for capturing the working-class Catholic vote.

A France of two nations, lay versus Catholic, dated from Leo X's refusal to recognise the French republic before 1879. The separate education of these two populaces created divisions along a clear class bias that are still in evidence today. The confrontation between the church and modernism heralded the collapse of religious belief and influence in an age of increasing materialism and scientific rationalism - despite the fact that the renewal of 'art sacré' occurred during brief periods of Catholic revivalism - both in the 1890s and paradoxically after both world wars. Modern art, associated from the outset with anticlericalism, non-conformism anti bohemia, was allied with the left and progressive political ideas. 2

The polemic about the decadence of nineteenth-century ecclesiastical art and its confrontation with modernism first came to crisis point in 1861. The furore centred upon the atheist Eugène Delacroix's *Chapelle des Saints Anges*, including *Jacob luttant avec l'ange* commissioned for the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris. In its romantic conception and free handling it flew in the face of the Beaux-Arts academicism and the third-hand Raphaelesque which was the norm for figurative church decoration by that time. The quartier of Saint-Sulpice specialised in the sale of saccharine ecclesiastical trappings and ornaments, giving rise to the term 'Saint-Sulpicien'. This epithet, however, was used not only to describe the more banal forms of sacred art but to denounce the more sentimental excesses of French socialist realism in post-Liberation France.

With both Communists and Catholics battling for votes and for the allegiance of hearts and minds after 1945, a dialectic was established between the notions of a liberated, materialist enlightenment and spiritual degeneracy. Thus, the communists defined the phases Renaissance, Reformation, the French Revolution and democracy, followed by the philosophy of the Encyclopedists as culminating in the doctrines of Marxism and dialectical materialism. Right-wing clerics and opponents of modernism such as Cardinal Paul Scortesco evoked this evolution in precisely the opposite sense, as the chart of the spiritual downfall of modern man.

Besides two world wars this development had led, he claimed, to: 'la disparition de huit pays de la carte spirituelle du monde; l'annihilation de millions et de millions d'êtres humains.'<sup>3</sup>

*Modern Sacred Art and the Church of Assy*, 1961, the pioneering study by William Rubin (future director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York) is in itself a fascinating document of early Cold War art history. However his simplification of the debate into 'Saint-Sulpiciens' versus enlightened moderns, overrides the historical indicators, provided in his text, about the extent of a sacred art debate in France prior to the post-1945 period. From the exchanges between Albert Cingria and Paul Claudel in 1919-21, and the brothers Perret's Notre-Dame du Raincy built near Paris; in 1923, both architectural questions and those of interior decoration with regard to modernism had been exhaustively investigated.' The debates had continued from the later nineteenth century and were exemplified by the career of the Nabi painter Maurice Denis, whose symbolist *Jacob luttant avec l'ange* was painted three years after his seminal revivalist work *Le Mystère Catholique* of 1898, a painting displayed as the centrepiece of religious art exhibitions in France throughout the post-1945 period. It was Denis who, in 1919, founded the Ateliers de l'Art Sacré, attempting to introduce a gentle and pious modernism into new churches. The destructions of both first and second world wars made church reconstruction imperative, of course, although Denis would not see the key Church monuments of the Cold War era: he was killed in a car crash in 1943.

While French modernism could be divided into right and left wings, with Denis, Gauguin, the Nabis and their offshoots on the right, Picasso-type modernism and socially-engaged art on the left, the situation was far more complex - to take the romanesque-inspired modifications and the religious humanism of the erstwhile cubist Albert Gleizes as just one example.<sup>5</sup> It is most succinctly summed up by Chanoine G. Arnaud d'Agnel's description of mutual exasperation: while progressive artists confronted the intellectual 'arrièrisme' and base visual philistinism of the priests and their congregations on the one hand, fine and sensitive theologians confronted a School of Paris largely immigrant or atheist, with no knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy, or its spiritual and symbolic requirements.<sup>6</sup>

Pius XI's inaugural speech for the Vatican Pinacothek in October 1932 condemned the forms of modern art used in churches which he classified as amoral, ugly, distorted, caricatural and 'hallucinatoire'. (nordic expressionism).<sup>7</sup> *Osservatore Romano's* campaign against modernism was well-established by 1934. In riposte, the *Cahiers de l'Art Sacré* were founded in France by the Dominicans Marie-Alain Couturier and P.R. Régamy in 1935 with an enlightened and pro-modernist agenda .

The Vatican could not deny the need for new churches, however - and hence the problem of style. It was formally represented in temporal splendour at both the 1931 Exposition Coloniale in Paris with the Pavillon des Missions catholiques, and at the Exposition Internationale of 1937 with the Pavillon des Artisans d'Art et de Foi (Pavillon Pontifical). In each case, the French architect, Paul Tournon, surrounded himself with a panoply of artists - including Maurice Denis and the master stained glass artist Jean Hebert-Stein.<sup>8</sup> Art deco luxury in an ecclesiastical mode expressed the height of spiritual and temporal aspirations; the very word 'artisan' in the pavilion's title signalled the influence of Jacques Maritain at this time. This was the hundredth project of the Chantiers du Cardinal, founded in 1931.<sup>9</sup> Their presence was particularly prominent in the marriage chapel which symbolised the rite of passage into the world of adulthood and work - as was that of the Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens (C.F.T.C. - the Christian syndicalist organisation) which focused on the church's engagement with social problems. For this was the era of the Popular Front: the

fundamental confrontations between the Catholic church and the communists which took place at this time rehearsed all the arguments which would reappear in post-Liberation France.

The first 'querelle de l'art sacré' over the installation of modern windows from the Pavillon Pontifical of 1937 into the cathedral of Notre-Darne, took place in the wake of the communist-generated 'querelle du réalisme' in the art world, and Maurice Thorez's repeated offers of 'la main tendue' in 1936 and 1937.<sup>10</sup> What appeared to some as an electoral ploy on Thorez's part to gain the working-class Catholic vote, was by others perceived as a very genuine attempt to unite 'les humbles': the industrial proletariat the Catholic poor.<sup>11</sup> Moreover Jacques Maritain's *Art et Scolastique* of 1920, reprinted, significantly, in 1935, contains an ideology of the 'métier' and the 'artisan' - nostalgia for a pre-industrial age, similar in so many ways to the more appealing side of Communist Party rhetoric.<sup>12</sup> Catholic humility and asceticism had their counterpart: 'misère' was a highly emotive word in the communist vocabulary: it overrode any objective analysis of the expendable nature of Taylorised manpower in a time of depression and unemployment.

While the Communist Party's triumph gave way to defeat and debate after 1936, the Church's inaction during the political crises of the late 1930s provided a symmetrical counterpart. The problems posed to Catholic intellectuals in conjunction with the wavering allegiances between right-wing groups and the left are demonstrated by the trajectory of the young Emmanuel Mounier.<sup>13</sup> The first number of his review *Esprit*, of October 1932 was entitled: 'Confrontations, Le Communisme devant l'Occident', and contained a text by the emigré Russian Nicolas Berdayev: 'Verité et mensonge du Communisme'. Berdayev's discussion of the national, religious roots and eschatological structures of Soviet communism would be elaborated in his publication of 1938: *Les sources et le sens du communisme russe*. The launching of *Esprit* thus coincided with Pius XI's denunciation of 'amoral art' which, interestingly enough in the light of the enthusiasm for Maritain and the romanesque, included 'déformations voulues... par de bons artistes épris de la naïveté du haut moyen age.' <sup>14</sup>

The romanesque and medievalist revival of the late 1930s was accentuated during the occupation of France, and was not, or course, not unrelated to the general return to artisanal and pre-industrial values that were being promoted under Vichy. (French Catholic collaboration during the war, and the vexed questions surrounding *Esprit's* relationship with Uriage and Vichy youth groups are beyond the scope of this article.)<sup>16</sup> The fusion of the modernist and the medieval is perfectly exemplified by Georges-Henri Adam's *Le Grand Gisant*, 1943, a post-cubist 'romanesque' tomb sculpture. In painting, the so-called 'Jeune peinture de tradition française' had its origins as a movement in the Vichy-based 'Jeune France' organisation. Much inspiration was found in the medieval stained glass of Chartres cathedral, as the cubist armature was fused, pictorially speaking, with the evocation of leaded contours. Indeed, the most prominent theoretician of the movement, Jean Bazaine, had experience in stained-glass ateliers. Paradoxically, the reference to the glass of Chartres was also the proof of the viability of a new abstract 'art sacré': it was evident that the legibility of windows which depicted complex narrative themes, such as the legend of the Good Samaritan was minimal to a ground-level spectator. <sup>17</sup> Realism and narrative as essentials for the 'bible of the illiterate poor' told in glass were thus discredited as a strategy. A more abstract appreciation of the symbolism of divine coloured light (stemming from the philosophy of Dionysus the Areopagite) could also be adopted to occupation values: red and blue, the colours of the Chartres windows signified patriotism and even a royalist parti-pris.

An abstract 'art sacré' was thus in order. Jean Bazaine was a catholic whose reading of Bergson was implicit in his abstract imagery of plunging, swirling forms. (His windows transfigured the Church of Saint Severin in Paris, 1965-70).<sup>18</sup> Alfred Manessier was actually converted to Catholicism during his stay in a Trappist monastery during the occupation. His *Salve Regina*, of 1945, painted to the strains of the Good Friday liturgy, was one of the most widely exhibited works in the postwar exhibitions of 'Art Sacré.'. The dominance of the 'jeunes peintres de tradition française' as representing the 'Nouvelle Ecole de Paris' in official postwar exhibitions, was not unconnected with their Catholic affiliations. The small easel painting market in this genre offered a way into abstract art often with a high degree of symbolic legibility. Manessier's *La Passion de Saint Mathieu*, 1948, an abstract red painting influenced by Paul Klee was transformed into both a musical and religious work merely by its title, while an evident crown of thorns and intimation of threat in *Barrabas*, 1952, mingled legible symbols with abstract forms.

The gentle French tradition promoted by this new generation of Catholic painters was jolted by the return of senior figures from America after the war, in particular Fernand Léger. Unexpected cross-fertilisations had taken place between Catholic and left-wing intellectuals exiled in America during the war years. Henri Focillon, author of *La vie des formes*, 1934 which gave a Bergsonian *élan vital* to the changing history of styles, Jacques Maritain himself, and above all the practising artist, Père Marie-Alain Couturier were seminal for the development of Léger's painting. Couturier, writing in *La Forme Humaine dans l'Espace*, collected essays on the artist published in Montreal in 1945, claimed Léger had all the strength of the twelfth and thirteenth century romanesque - only commissions were lacking for his art to transfigure the new churches of France. Léger's protofigurative works of acrobats, divers and more abstract forms were 'actuellement purement profanes» mais [qu']elles ont, dès maintenant et du fait même de leur abstrait, tout ce qu'il faut pour devenir religieuses. <sup>20</sup>

Léger's first undertaking in a sacred mode, appropriately enough with his friend, the modernist and fellow-traveller Le Corbusier, was inspired by Paul Claudel's curious scheme for a subterranean church in Chicago in 1943. Returning to France, plans were laid for the ecumenical Basilique Universelle de la Paix et du Pardon. This was to be sited at Saint Baume, near both the relics of Mary Magdalen and Le Corbusier's proposed Maison d'Habitation in Marseilles. The highly controversial project ground to a halt in 1948.<sup>21</sup> By this time Léger had become a member of the Communist Party. In the wake of Picasso's membership (October 1944) and portrait heads of Maurice Thorez (1945), immense propaganda coups for the Communist Party, Léger sent a declaration of membership by telegram from America in 1945, and drew his own head of Thorez.

Yet while Léger produced jovial images of the Front Populaire proletariat on biking holidays (*Les Loisirs*, 1948-9, and his optimistic *Constructeurs* series 1950-1), and Picasso the nymphs, fauns and ceramics of his Antibes period, a hardline socialist realism emerged in the wake of the Zhdanov-inspired Socialist realist directives in art of 1946-7, coincident with the formal declarations of Cold War.<sup>22</sup> The eschatological dimension of communist belief, discussed by Berdayev in the 1930s, was now given visible form. Conventional religious tropes structured hardline socialist realist paintings, just as hagiographical traditions were employed by writers and propagandists. For both paradise and the triumph of the proletariat were based on a rhetoric of the future, an idealised realm, a utopia.

The two most prominent socialist-realist painters had used Christian imagery by default during the Occupation. At the request of Gaullist catholic prisoners in the presciently named camp of Saint-Sulpice-La Pointe, Boris Taslitzky had painted a *Christ aux outrages*- prior to his own deportation to Buchenwald.<sup>23</sup> André Fougeron elided the imagery of the guillotined resistant with the decapitated Saint Denis for his contribution to the lithograph collection *Vaincre*. His martyr was aureoled with the words from Aragon's Musée Grévin: "Je vous salue ma France, sol semé des heros"<sup>24</sup> Surprisingly, perhaps, Fougeron, secretary of the Front National des Arts resistance organisation turned to the distinguished religious painter Maurice Denis for a president. Denis's status as a senior figure was unquestionable; after his accidental death in 1943 the post passed to Picasso - a far more contentious and problematic choice.

Fougeron's painting, *Terres Cruelles* commemorating the mining accidents of the 1947-50 period perfectly exemplifies the eschatological imagery of hard-line socialist realism: The transposition Holleu's *Dead Christ* in the Louvre, to the body of a dead mineworker is obvious in *Terres Cruelles*. Its 'miserabilisme' has a triumphalist couterpoint in Défense Nationale, which appropriates the revolutionary rhetoric of Jacques-Louis David's *Serment des Horaces* (his bicentenary celebrations had been held in 1948).<sup>25</sup> Boris Taslitzky's depiction of the death of the Jeunesse Communiste's heroine, Danielle Casanova at Auschwitz, was again obviously hagiographic. It was based in fact upon his 1938 copy of Saint Bonaventure on his bier, c. 1629 by Zurbaran also from the Louvre. Commissioned in 1950, the painting, based on documents and Taslitzky's own experience of Buchenwald, was deployed in various exhibitions with the aim of rekindling animosity against Germany at the time of its rearmament and the debates surrounding a common European defence policy.

While parallels may indeed be seen between this didactic art, hard-line communist behaviour and Counter-Reformationist zeal, Maurice Thorez continued to pursue his *main tendue* policy after 1947 and the party's political isolation. In April, 1949 a resolution was passed at the national Communist Party conference in Montreuil: 'Appliquer résolument la politique de la main tendue aux travailleurs catholiques et ne jamais se départir dans notre action pour la défense de la laïcité du respect des opinions et des croyances de chacun.'<sup>26</sup>

The Communist Party policy coincided of course with the Comintern-backed Peace movement initiatives and the attempt to court the new female vote ( women traditionally being more religious and conservative than their husbands). The penetration of communist artists such as Fernand Léger and Jean Lurçat into the Eglise d'Assy project, may be interpreted not only as a corrective as regards the very negative perception of hardline socialist realists among the liberal and Catholic intelligentsia, but from the political perspective of the 'main tendue'. The Communist approach was complemented by the ecumenical, not to say laissez-faire attitudes of Père Couturier and fellow enlightened clerics (mostly Dominican).

Emmanuel Mounier's personalist review, *L'Esprit* relaunched and politically revised, was heavily involved in the debate from April 1946, with its number 'Le Communisme devant nous' to 1948, with its special May-June issue on 'Marxisme et scolasticisme' of July 1948, when the well-respected 'worker-priest' movement was at its height. The prestigious Hungarian intellectual Georg Lukacs declared: 'toutefois le marxisme présente aussi un autre aspect... un côté messianique, quasi-religieux' in the obituary number of August 1948 devoted to Nicolas Berdyaev, corroborating the latter's theses. <sup>27</sup>

However, on July 14th, 1949, the Catholic Holy Office forbade Catholics to join the Communist Party. The Church's decision to sabotage any rapprochement caused much heartache to working-class, Communist voters who had not renounced their religion, and was judged by Emmanuel Mounier as 'une erreur historique massive'.<sup>28</sup> Both this decision and Pius XII's encyclical of November 1947, *Mediator Dei et Hominem* (pronounced after his blessing of Marie-Alain Couturier and the Assy project in 1946) would affect the reception of the most controversial example of 'art sacré' in the postwar period, Notre-Dame-de-Toute-Grace at Assy.<sup>29</sup>

The project on the Assy plateau, facing Mont Blanc had started before the war under the auspices of the Dominicans. [It is important to note that the church served, not an indigenous community, but the patients of a sanatorium - hence a range of Catholic, agnostic and atheistic positions. The church was finally inaugurated on August 4th, 1950, during the year of the Catholic Church's semicentennial Jubilee. *Mediator Dei et Hominem*, 1947, concerning the holy liturgy was thus issued after many design decisions had been made and commissions were underway. The encyclical declared, alas, -that the Church, while an 'organisme vivant' should not be a place of experimentation, nor should the holy figures be assailed by 'depravation' or 'deformations'. Accession to the sacred was via the liturgy, which ranked above the arts, despite the role of the arts in embodying the liturgy and facilitating its comprehension. <sup>30</sup> Maurice Novarina's chalet-inspired design respected local traditions, and local craftsmen such as Constant Demaison were involved in the Church's decoration. The modernist contributions, however, generated an international polemic, discussed in *Life* magazine in the United States and as far afield as Egypt. <sup>31</sup>

Fernand Léger's magnificent mosaic façade for the Eglise d'Assy, completed in 1949, was a key focus of discontent. Architecturally, it was based on the Pavillon des Chemins de Fer at the 1937 Paris World Fair, the mosaic facade partly concealed behind frontal white pillars. The Virgin's titles 'Rose mystique, Vase d'honneur, Etoile du matin, Trône de la Sagesse, Jardin fleuri, Tour de David, Arche de la Mariée, Miroir de la Justice' criss-crossed the façade like a hymn or prayer, designating compartments for the signs and images in mosaic.

Immediately there were hostile reactions: 'La génie de Léger s'est déployé en monstres d'un hideur splendide'. Cardinal Paul Scorsesco, writing in 1953 was crueler and specifically anti-Communist: 'La tête de la Vierge de Fernand Léger puisqu'elle n'est qu la presence de Fernand Léger, est un blasphème...' The mural was 'un puzzle géométrico-mécanique qui entoure une tête de brute au front bas et au yeux qui louchent. Il n'y manque que le poing fermé !'<sup>32</sup> The communist and Resistant Jean Lurçat, the key figure for the Renaissance of French tapestry after the war, contributed an impressive hanging, based on medieval Apocalypse imagery which dominated the apse. Certain of the faithful were disturbed by the prominence of the beast at the expense of God: Couturier's response was that God was great enough to look after Himself.

Just as Marc Chagall's retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne in 1947 could be seen as an official act of penitence for complicity in the liquidation of the largely Jewish School of Paris before and during the war, so Chagall's commissions at Assy for paintings and ceramics were another symbolic act of reconciliation in which the Jewish descentance of the crucified Christ figured prominently. The Jewish sculptor and communist sympathiser Jacques Lipchitz - whose maquette and studio contents actually went up in flames during the project - finally evolved his moving sculpture *Notre Dame de Liesse*, its back inscribed with the words:

`Jacob Lipchitz Juif fidèle à la fois de ces ancêtres a fait cette vierge pour la bonne entente des hommes sur la terre afin que l'esprit règne'.

Religious catholics also participated in the Assy project of course: the ageing Pierre Bonnard contributed a large canvas, Saint François de Sales . A magnificent series of stained glass windows by Georges Rouault eclipsed those of the younger artist Jean Bazaine, whose iconography seemed awkward compared with his abstract painting at the time. 33 Paradoxically, it was not the engagement of Jews and Communists - but the 'existentialist' and miserabilist intimations of Germaine Richier's crucifix that caused the biggest scandal. Christ's body, emaciated and bark-like appeared fused with the wood of the Cross in the small but powerful bronze. A riot and an Integrist tract proclaiming it an infamous profanation led ultimately to the removal of the work by the Bishop of Annecy. 34' Jean Cassou, curator of the Musée National d'Art Moderne and communist fellow traveller to 1948, was driven to proclaim that modern art had three enemies, Hitler, Stalin and the Pope. His adjoint, Bernard Dorival added America to the anathema: 'C'est plaisir de voir comment en ce domaine nos évêques succèdent avec le Kremlin, La Maison Blanche et feu M. Hitler.' 35 'The Vatican's direct attack: on Assy came on 10 June 1950: 'Dell'Arte sacra deformatrice', an article translated and reproduced all over the world, denounced Assy as a pastiche and an insult to the majesty of God. 36 While Assy's pioneering status and media triumph was incontestable, it was generally slated for its eclecticism. This charge could not be levelled at the Chapelle of the Rosaire created by the over eighty year old Henri Matisse for the Dominican nuns at Vence.

Matisse's chapel represented the outcome of four years of exclusive work - he regarded it as the crowning achievement of his life as an artist. 37 Yet since his involvement with Louis Aragon and the many hours spent together in Nice during the war, he too was considered if not a 'peintre communiste' a 'peintre communiste' and his belief in God was ambiguous to say the least: 'Si je crois en Dieu? Oui, quand je travaille.' These famous words were calligraphed in Jazz, the paper cut-out book published by Tériade in 1947, where a religious source - the twelfth-century manuscript, the Apocalypse de Saint Sever, was crucial ( as it had been for Fernand Léger.)

Louis Aragon, nationally considered as the Communist spokesman in the arts after 1947, wrote extensive studies on Matisse in 1943 and 1947. The first 'Matisse-en-France' emphasised medievalism and patriotism. The second, which appeared during his own push for socialist realism, at a time of extremely austere conditions in France, had the effrontery to call itself 'Apologie du luxe'. 38 In 1949, the contrast between the Matisse exhibition of recent work at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in the summer and the first room of the Salon d'Automne in September, completely dominated by social realist painting, demonstrated the irreconcilable tensions in Aragon's position. So did the poet's preface to the exhibition of his painting and sculpture at the Maison de la Pensée Française which lasted from July to September, 1950. Despite Françoise Gilot's recent claims to the contrary, I believe that Matisse's insistence on exhibiting a scale model of the Vence chapel in this communist-sponsored venue had been unforeseen by Aragon, who envisaged a display of new paper cut-out works in conjunction with the first showing of almost the whole of Matisse's sculptural output. Was Matisse's gesture an ironic nod to *la main tendue* - a plea for dialogue - or a lofty statement of the artist's transcendence of the Catholic-communist debate? 39

Most scandalous for more conservative Catholics, were Matisse's sketchy graffiti for the Stations of Cross, disposed synoptically on one plane and transferred to a large white ceramic

wall in the Vence chapel. The black signs had the urgency of early Christian messages scribbled hastily in the catacombs. As Père Couturier said: 'Quelle autre écriture conviendrait quand il s'agit de me parler de la Passion? Il me suffit de ces signes violents: ils me disent déjà l'essentiel. Qu'ài je besoin d'autre chose? 40 - but his perceptions were not shared by all believers. The triumphant and innovative final conception of the chapel itself, (designed by Auguste Perret) transposed the paper cut-out designs to stained glass windows through which pure light colours the white-tiled interior with its black graffiti designs of the Virgin, Saint Dominic and the wall of the Stations of the Cross.

The Vence Chapel had another important role to play in the Catholic/ communist debate as catalyst for Picasso's *La Guerre et la Paix* murals in Vallauris. Picasso, his spirit of competition no stranger to the situation, had accepted the offer of a deconsecrated chapel in the pottery town of Vallauris in August 1950, furious at Matisse's collaboration with the clerics. 40? Here he would install his mural paintings *La Guerre* and *La Paix* at the height of the Cold War, in a 'Sixtine Chapel' of secular and political protest.

Before turning to Picasso however, additional enterprises by Léger and indeed Le Corbusier must be mentioned. The relationship between Léger's theory of the object and an emblematic mode whose origins lay in the insignia of workman's guilds may be seen to govern his stained glass production. The ropes and the spades in his 'syndicalist' panel of 1937 at the Paris World Fair are transformed, simply by their context, in the windows for the Eglise du Sacré Coeur at Audincourt of 1950-1.'Z Symbols shift from reference to the industrial world of the proletariat, to become signs of Christian humility and Christ's passion. Each of the series of panels reenacts the Stages of the Cross by depicting the very emblems, hammers, nails, ladders that related to the different guilds of craftsmen and marked the division of scenes in the old Passion plays. *Condamnation de la Guerre* a window patterned with swords, lances and doves, contained the word 'Pax' in glass evoking not only religious peace, but the contemporary engagement of artists such as Léger and Picasso and the hardliners with the *Mouvement de la Paix*, launched in the wake of the Stockholm appeal against the atomic bomb. 43 Yet Léger could still be publicly derogatory about organised religion: In a lecture given at the Sorbonne around 1950, he contrasts his ideal of 'Un peuple digne, debout, de plan-pied dans le présent, souriant à l'avenir, marchant Nharmonieusement vers son destin objectif et rationnel' with the people of the Christian era: 'à genoux, la tête dans la poussière, attendant un miracle insensé et qui veulent ignorer leur destinée terrestres... Les religions sont des 'cocaines' . C'est vouloir vivre les yeux fermées, nier la lumière, cultiver la nuit'...44

The war memorial that Léger decorated in Bastogne, Belgium in 1950 was conspicuously non-sectarian. Léger's semicircular crypt decorations confront the Bible marked with a— Christian cross and the Jewish seven-branched candlestick on the facing wall . The outside view as photographed for *Art d'Aujourd'hui* in October 1950 had an American Stars and Stripes flag flying in front of the building. America had been an essential part of Léger's experience - and his market - since the 1930s; at the height of the Communist Party' anti-Americanism, one may take this as another symbol of the artist deliberately flouting the Party line.

For the church of Courfaivre, constructed in the industrial suburbs, Léger's work once more shows links both with his own past motifs in a more materialistic age, and the traditional 'rosaces' of the French cathedral 45. Léger's friend and collaborator, Le Corbusier, the notoriously 'bolchevik' architect of the 1930s, created the Eglise de Ronchamps project overlooking the Vosges and the Jura mountains - an ancient place of pilgrimage to the Virgin.

Along with Matisse's chapel at Vence it may be considered the second triumph of an art sacré 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. Edifices had succeeded each other on the site from the eighth century: a nineteenth century church was struck by lightning and razed in 1913, a fake-gothic reconstruction of 1924 was destroyed during Liberation battles in 1944. Le Corbusier's plans were approved in January 1951 by the Archbishop of Besançon and his Art Sacré commission: combining the religious notion of the nave as ship or ark with vestiges of Le Corbusier's ocean liner aesthetic - and inspiration from a crab shell - a work of intense beauty was created. Pierced with coloured light from irregular window openings, and decorated with Le Corbusier's paintings, it was in itself a spiritual experience. Inaugurated in 1955, over two years after the death of Stalin and the effective end of a coherent communist cultural policy, it is not seminal to my conclusion .46

'Le cas Picasso' however, certainly is. While, ironically, Picasso's first finished masterpieces as a youth in the Barcelona of 1896 had been scenes of the Annunciation or First Communion using a range of ecclesiastical props in his master's studio, his prodigiousness was perceived in Paris as both 'foreign' and diabolic.' 47 For those beyond the pale of art, modernism had equalled 'du Picasso' since 1907; the evil which this represented was compounded for the devout by his Party membership of 1944: hence the diatribe of Cardinal Paul Scorsesco, a veritable Camille Mauclair of the Catholic Church with his books *Satan Voici ta Victoire* and *Saint Picasso. Peignez pour nous*, both of 1953. The first sets out the description of spiritual degeneration reversing the Marxist chronology of enlightenment as described in my introduction. The second, a Jeremiad on modern art, and Assy in particular has no real focus on Picasso despite a demoniac verdict: 'Picasso ensemeñca le monde d'incubes et de succubes.' 48

While Scorsesco's vision is vitriolically manichaean, Picasso himself posited a state of manichean dialectic with the two complementary visions, *La Guerre* and *La Paix*, mural paintings on board, installed on the walls of the deconsecrated chapel in Vallauris, renamed 'Le Temple de la Paix'. While *La Paix* is a Golden Age painting whose precursors are the nymphs and fauns painted after Picasso's 1946 move to the south, *La Guerre*, inevitably the stronger of the two mural paintings, positively exemplifies the diabolically inspired catastrophes of the Cold War period. Indeed, whether intentional or subconscious, Picasso's naked peace warrior who stands with doves on his shield, obviously lacks the power to withstand the onslaught of a mad, black chariot whose very passage creates auto-da-fés in its wake. Hunched figures in the black chariot carry sacks of skulls. Microbes are visible beneath a microscope lens: an image of biological warfare in Korea '9 Work had begun on 28 April, 1952, immediately in the aftermath of a nation-wide rebellion of communist painters and a specific challenge to Aragon's hardline socialist realist edicts in Paris. 50 Following Pius XII's pronouncement on 8 April 1952 that the Christian artist should be both cleft and 'pacifique', the 28 April 1952 was the very day of the Episcopate insisting that the Christian artist should respect the directives of the Church hierarchy. Picasso's dating was always deliberate... s' June 30th, 1952 saw the 'Instruction du Saint Office sur l'Art Sacré', a formal condemnation of shocking representations ('images insolites') along with mediocre and commercial art sacré. The legislative powers of Canon Law regarding art sacré, and the necessity for faith and picky were emphasised as prerequisites for any artistic commissions. 52 The following September the Curia decided to terminate the 'worker-priest' experiment: the evangelism and the modernist pragmatism of the Dominicans were rebuffed, their power curtailed. 53

Much media attention focused as a result of both socialist-realist and art sacré debates upon Picasso, Léger and Matisse at this time, continuing into 1953 - hence over the period of the death of Stalin, confusion and policy changes in the Communist Party. The symbolic anathema placed upon the hard-line painter André Fougeron at the autumn Salon of 1953, signified the effective end of hardline socialist realism. Picasso's *La Guerre* and *La Paix* themselves, each five by ten metres were exhibited in Milan and Rome in 1953 before their final installation in Vallauris, with full communist pomp and circumstance and an ecstatic press: 'Reconciliation complet entre Picasso et le P.C' declared the Journal du Dimanche 54 They were not placed in the chapel - completely filling its barrel-vaulted space, until February 1954, when for the Party Picasso's prestige value in terms of their own redemption was one again inestimable.

Was the Temple de la Paix in Vallauris the triumph of Satan in an ancient place of worship? Or a modernist, anticlerical Sistine Chapel of our times devoted to the triumph of the humble and the ideology of world peace?

The collapse of the viability of a two-pronged *art de parti* coincided with an increasing materialism and lack of faith in a new consumer-orientated society. Despite the reforming objectives of Vatican II, set up in 1959, one could point to the halt: finished ruin of Le Corbusier's Eglise Saint-Pierre in Firminy (commissioned in 1960) as eloquent testimony to the end of an era. 55 Despite the prologation of debate - of church-building and the ideology of the *main tendue*, the power of the eschatological image, Catholic or communist, was effectively displaced. The decade of confrontation and collaboration in the arena of sacred art, from 1945-1955 describes a unique moment in French intellectual and artistic history.

#### NOTES.

1. Cardinal Paul Scortesco: *Saint Picasso peignez pour nous. ou les deux conformismes*, Paris, Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1953, p 79.

2. See the introduction to 'Vatican II', in Mircea Eliade ed.: *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, New York, Maemillan Publishing Company;(vol. 15, p 199 - 205.

3. Paul Scortesco: *Satan. voici ta victoire*, Paris, Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1953, prologue, unpaginated.

4. See the survey by Chanoine G. Arnaud d'Agnel: *L'Art Religieux Moderne*, two vols., with an extensive bibliography and 320 héliogravures, Grenoble, B.Arthaud éditeur, 1936; 'Bilan de l'époque 1920-1940', *Art Sacré*, Mareh April 1948, and Jospeh Picard: *L'Art Sacré Moderne*, Paris/Grenoble, B. Arthaud éditeur, 1953.

5. See Albert Gleizes: *Homocentrisme. ou le Retour de l'homme chrétien. suivi de le Rythme des Arts plastiques*, Sablons, Moly Sabata, 1937, and other publications.

6. Arnaud d'Agnel, *L'Art Religieux Moderne*, vol 1. p 79.

7. See Arnaud d'Agnel: *L'Art Religieux Moderne*, Chapter VI: 'L'art moderne religieux et le droit canon' for a summary of Pius XI's speech and discussion of articles 1164, 1279 and 1296 of recent canon law.

8. See P de Rivers de Mauny: 'Le Pavillon des Missions Catholiques', *L'Artisan Liturgique*, January-March, 1932, and Corinne Wiktor: 'Etats Pontificaux' in Paris 1937. *Cinquante ans de l'Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*, Paris, Institut Français d'Architecture, 1987, pp 152-7.

9. Canon Touzé, curate of Saint Jean Baptiste de Grenne was created 'Vicaire Général et Directeur de l'oeuvre des nouvelles paroisses' by Mon. Verdier who was later appointed Cardinal, hence 'Les Chantiers du Cardinal'. Thanks to Glenda Stecle for this clarification, and for references, note 53.

10. See Louis Aragon et alia: *La Querelle du Réalisme*, Paris, Editions Sociales Internationales, 1936; Sarah Wilson; *Art and the Politics of the Left in France. 1935-1955*, Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1991-2, Chapter 1, p 56-67, and 'La Querelle des Vitraux de Notre Dame', *L'Art Sacré*, February 1938. A Congrès International Artistique et Technique du Vitrail in 1937 was followed by the Exposition d'Art Sacré Moderne, Musée des Arts Décoratifs from November 1938-January 1939.

11. See Maurice Thorez: *Communistes et catholiques: la main tendue*. Paris. Editions du comité populaire de propagande, 1937, and *Pour l'Union. Communistes et Catholiques*, Paris, Editions Sociales, 1949, for a series of speeches throughout 1936 and 1937.

12. Maritain's *Art et Scolastique* was written in 1918-19, serialised in *Les Lettres*, September-October 1919, published with additions in *Art Catholique*. 1920, re-edited by Louis Rouart et fils in 1935 and Desclée de Brower in 1965. While underlining that 'l'Art est un vertu intellectuel/' and making transitions from Phidias to 'le

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forgeron' its precepts were fairly tautological: 'L'art religieux doit être religieux... Soyez chrétien, et cherchez à faire oeuvre belle où passera votre coeur...'

13 See John Hellman: *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left. 1930-1950*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981, chs 1-6.

14. Nicolas Berdyaev: 'Vérité et mensonges du communisme', *Esprit*, no 1, 1932; *Les sources et le sens du communisme russe*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1938, re-edited 1951 and 1963. See in particular Chapter VII 'Le communisme et le christianisme.'

15. Pius XI, summarised in Arnaud d'Agnel: *L'Art Religieux Moderne*, Chapter VI, p 76.

16. See W.D. Halls: 'French Christians and the German Occupation' in *Collaboration in France. Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944*, Eds & Hirschfeld and P. Marsh, Berg Publications, Oxford, New York, Munich, pp 72-91. See also Abbés Godin and Daniel: *La France. un pays de mission*, 1943, art articles in periodicals such as *Chantiers* and *Le Rouge et le Bleu* and *Vers le style du XXe siècle* by the équipe d'Uriage, directed by G. Gadoffre, Paris, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1945. Laurence Bertrand-Dorléac's punctiliously researched forthcoming book upon art in France during the occupation will supplement and



28. Lucien Guissard: Emmanuel Mounier, Paris, Editions Universitaires, Paris, 1963, p 120. See also Roger Garaudy, *L'elise. Le communisme et les chrétiens*, Paris, Editions Sociales, 1949.
29. See 'Le Père Couturier', *Art Sacré*, no 9-10, May-June 1954, p 31 for Couturier's stay in Rome from March to April 1946 and the Pope's blessing of the Assy project.
30. See Madeleine Ochse: *La nouvelle querelle des images*, Paris, Le Poids du jour, Le Centurion, 1952, 'les directions de l'Eglise' pp 26-9 for a summary of the Encyclical *Mediator Dei* Paris, Editions Bonne Presse, n.d.
31. The arguments are given exhaustive treatment in 'Bilan d'une querelle', *Art Sacré*, May-June, 1952. For the Egypt reference see Henri de Montand: 'Art Sacré et Théologie', *Etudes*, December, 1951, p 314.
32. 'Appendice. Autour de l'église d'Assy', in *Problèmes de l'Art Sacré*, edited by Victor-Henri Debidour, Paris, Editions Le Nouveau Portique, 1951, p 291. Subsequently see Paul Scortesco: *Saint Picasso peignez pour nous*, Chapter 9: 'Assy et Saint Sulpice' pp 62 and 65.
33. William Rubin: *Modern Sacred Art and the Church of Assy*, Columbia University Press, 1961, Part II: 'Architecture and Decorations of the Church of Assy' for Chagall, Lipchitz, Bonnard, Rouault and Bazaine. More accessible and excellently illustrated for Léger, see Peter de Francia: *Fernand Léger*, Yale University Press, 1983 New Jersey and London, chapter 10: 'The Late Works'.
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34. 'On ne se moque pas de Dieu', the 'tracte d'Angers' with Richier's crucifix labelled 'Le Christ? NON, Un scandale pour la piété chrétienne' is reproduced in 'le dossier de la "querelle"', *Art Sacré*, no 9-10, May-June 1952, p 4.
35. Jean Cassou: 'Paris: Controversy and Quintessence', *Art News*, April, 1951, cited in Rubin, *Modern Sacred Art*, p 51; Bernard Dorival: 'Epurons les églises', *La Table Ronde*, June, 1951.
36. See Rubin, *Modern Sacred Art* pp 54-5 for extensive quotation and discussion. For the French text see S. Em. le cardinal Celso Constantini: *La Nouvelle hérésie iconographique*, C.S. E.EEE, Angers, no date.
37. Invited by the Dominican novice, Sister Jacques (his nurse and model) to decorate a new chapel at Vence in 1948, Matisse turned for inspiration to religious art. He studied Mantegna, he drew the praying hands by Grunewald, and recalled his own early copy of Philippe de Champaigne's *Dead Christ*, when reworking his heavily simplified drawings of the recumbent crucified body in 1949.
38. Louis Aragon: 'Matisse-en-France' (preface) Henri Matisse. *Thèmes et Variations*, Paris, Martin Fabiani éditeur, 1943 'Apollologie du Luxe' (preface) Matisse, Geneva, *Les Trésors de la Peinture Française*, Albert Skira, 1946. In addition, Matisse asked Aragon to preface his Philadelphia retrospective catalogue of 1948.

39. See Henri Matisse. Chapelle. Peintures .Dessins. Sculptures, Maison de la Pensée Française, July 5th - September 24th, 1950, preface by Aragon. Aragon's 'Que l'un fût de la chapelle', 1969, in Henri Matisse. roman, Vol II p 179 et seq. attempts to refute Alfred H Barr's synopsis of the story written at the height of the Cold War in 1951. Aragon's collected writings and later interpolations which constitute Henri MATisse. roman, while certainly the most passionate, personal and beautifully written of all analyses of the artist's work, were designed nonetheless as an implicit 'autocritique' of the author's confused but intransigent commitment to the Stalinist line up to 1956.

40. Quoted in Les Chapelles du Rosaire à Vence par Matisse et de Notre-Dame de Haut à Ronchamp par Le Corbusier, Paris. Les Editions du Cerf, c 1950, p 10.

41. The otter was made on August 6th, 1950, when Laurent Casanova officially accepted Picasso's bronze statue Homme à l'anneau, 1944, for the municipality.

42. See L'Art Sacré no 3-4, November-December 1951, p , for the Commission Diocésaine d'Art Sacrés unanimous approval of Léger's sketches and Jean Bazaine's mosaic for Audincourt, and Le Corbusier's plans for Ronchamp.

43. It was his personal experience of two world wars, the sacred necessity of commemoration that was important for Léger - the waste of human life for political ends that he condemned again at the Vienna Peace Congress in 1952.

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44 Léger: 'De l'Acropole à la Tour Eiffel', Sorbonne conference circa 1950, published as an appendix to Garaudy: Pour un réalisme du XXe siècle...Dialogue posthume avec Fernand Léger, Paris, Editions Bernard Grasset, 1968.

45. For fuller illustration of the stained glass for Audincourt and Courtaivre see Georges Bauquier: Fernand Léger. Vivre dans le Vrai, Paris, Adrien Maeghe éditeur, 1987.

46. See 'Le Corbusier et Ronchamp', Art Sacré. September-October 1955: Le 7y Corbusier: The church at Roincharap. London. Architectural Press. 1956. Tim Bentons essay, 'The sacred and the scare for myths' in Le Corbusier. Architect of the Century, London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1987, pp 238 - 277 gives comprehensive coverage of his art sacre projects including Firminy (see below).

47. See John Richardson: A Life of Picasso, London, Jonathan Cape, 1991, vol 1, 1881-1906, Chapter 5: 'Sacred Subjects', p 70-88. The diabolic imagery unfortunately persists even in this 'myth-dispelling' study.

48. See Scortesco: Satan. voici ta Victoire, 1953, and Saint Picasso. Peignez pour nous, 1953, p 79. Scortesco, a Romanian, was described as 'Peintre, poète et musicien, venu tard au Catholicisme', in the preface to his first publication Go: et Magog. Face aux deux sources de la décadence moderne, Paris, Editions du Cèdre, 1952, which announced the need for a 'Croisade universelle contre l'athéisme homicide'(p 159). (Camille Mauclair's long career as

an art critic from the late 19th century onwards ended in the complete espousal of antimodern, antisemitic aesthetics: *La crise de l'art moderne*, Paris, no publisher, 1944.

49. The biological warfare reference was first published by Kirsten Hoving Kcen; 'Picasso's Communist interlude: the murals of War and Peace', *Burlington Magazine*, July 1980. Her ignorance of the full dimensions of the socialist realist debate leaves her insights deprived of much of their context.

50. This great debate documented in the pages of *Les Lettres Francaises*, achieved international press coverage and heralded the demise of socialist-realist politics is described in detail in Wilson, *Art and the Politics of the Left*, Chapter 6.

51. See Ochsc, *La Nouvelle querelle des images*, p 31 et sequ. for Pius XII's announcement to the artists of the Rome Quadriennale on 8 April 1952, and a summary of his 28 April directives. These are reproduced in full in 'Directives' de l'Episcopat', *Art Sacré*, no 9-10, May-June 1952, p 29-30.

52. The 'Instruction du Saint Office sur l'Art Sacré (30 June 1952)' is reproduced in full in Ochse, *La nouvelle querelle des images*, Appendix 11, p 137 -142.

53. See Andre Collange: *Le Scandale du XXe siècle et le Drame des Prêtres-ouvriers*, Paris, Editions O. Perrin, 1959, and François le Prieur: *Où Rome condamne. Les Dominicains et les Prêtres-Ouvriers*, Paris, Editions du Cerf / Terres Humaines, 1989.

54. 'Réconciliation totale entre Picasso et le P.C.' marked *Journal du Dimanche*, no date, Hélène Parmelin archives, Paris.

55. Vatican II, the twenty-first ecumenical council was held from 1962-5 in St Peter's, Rome. See Walter M. Abbott ed. *The Documents of Vatican II in a new and definitive translation*, New York, 1966.

The Communist triumph in the municipal elections at Firminy in 1971, emphasised spending priorities more urgent than Le Corbusier's second *Unité d'habitation* and church. This hastened the demise of what is now a ruin, tardily classified for an uncertain posterity by Jack Lang.