

Humanae Vitae 17: *Vaticinium ex eventu?*
An Illustration from the Maritains'
Moral Guidance to Maurice Sachs

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Introduction

IN REMARKS prepared for a conference that commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*, Father Ernest Fortin, A.A., made the following observation: “In retrospect, *Humanae Vitae* can be said to have been truly prophetic. It foresaw that the use of contraceptives and the development of a contraceptive mentality would deal a severe blow to family life and therewith to society as a whole.”¹ The text that Father Fortin probably had in mind is found at §17 of the 1968 encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI:

Not much experience is needed in order to know human weakness, and to understand that men—especially the young, who are so vulnerable on this point—have need of encouragement to be faithful to the moral law, so that they must not be offered some easy means of eluding its observance. (*Humanae Vitae*, §17)

In 1993 at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, Father Fortin included among the unhappy consequences of the widespread acceptance of contraceptives the fact that “homosexual partnerships are

¹ Ernest Fortin, “*Humanae Vitae*’s Silver Jubilee: Twenty-Five Years Later,” in *Ernest L. Fortin: Collected Essays*, vol. 4, *Ever Ancient, Ever New: Ruminations on the City, the Soul, and the Church*, ed. Michael P. Foley (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 164.

being granted both family status in law and the right to adopt children.”² He wondered about future “nightmarish choices.” He was right to wonder out loud. In 2008, Massachusetts and Connecticut now recognize civil marriages between persons of the same sex.

This paper reports on the distinctively Catholic moral guidance that Jacques and Raïssa Maritain gave to a certain young Frenchman named Maurice Sachs. We know of course that Jacques Maritain and Pope Paul VI were friends. It remains speculation whether the following story of Maurice Sachs may have contributed to that warning—the one Father Fortin calls “prophetic”—that is contained in §17 of *Humanae Vitae*. In other terms, whether this text does in fact constitute a *vaticinium ex eventu*.

Some Background to Sexual Mores *entre les deux guerres*

Taking a broad view, the English philosopher, Roger Scruton, has observed that the situation of French intellectuals during the early twentieth century was not unlike that of the English intellectuals. Writers and artists were drawn in three directions—towards a kind of iconized vision of France and her Catholic faith, towards a flamboyant bohemianism that defied bourgeois conventions, and towards the new universal faith of the communist Church.³ The Maritains became acquainted with representative figures from each class. The early decades of the twentieth century also witnessed a marked increase in the number of homosexual liaisons that occurred among *les vedettes* of the Paris literary and artistic salons. These ephemeral gay relationships were countenanced for the most part by the fashionable elite that inhabited *le beau monde*. What one may describe as a sociological phenomenon, this “world” forms some of the background for the exercise of that divine mission to evangelize that Jacques and Raïssa Maritain undertook with passion during “les Années Folles.”

The Figure of Maurice Sachs (1906–1945)

To explore the Maritains as spiritual guides for the perplexed, I have chosen one figure from the period, Maurice Sachs, a man whose biography is subtitled, *Les travaux forcés de la frivolité*.⁴ If we follow the standard accounts of this Frenchman’s topsy-turvy life, he comes out looking like the poster boy for French-style bohemianism. Truth to tell, however,

² Ibid.

³ In private research that Professor Roger Scruton has contributed to a research project on natural law underway at the Institute for the Psychological Sciences in Arlington, Virginia.

⁴ Henri Raczymow, *Maurice Sachs, ou Les travaux forcés de la frivolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988). Sachs himself coined the expression. See p. 423.

Maurice Sachs at various times and at other times perhaps simultaneously followed all three of the directions that Roger Scruton sketches out to describe the paths taken by early twentieth-century French intellectuals.

It should be noted first of all, that the second path, that of flamboyant bohemianism, was not explicitly or exclusively homosexual. It was, again on Roger Scruton's account, a path of wit, satire, bohemianism and cosmopolitanism, a thousand miles from the patriotic fervor of Charles Péguy. It owed much, however, to Péguy's contemporary Guillaume Apollinaire, illegitimate son of a Polish mother. Apollinaire coined the term "surrealism" and revived interest in the works of the Marquis de Sade. He wrote erotic novels as well as the verses (for example, *Alcools*) which made him famous, and was perhaps the first apostle of Transgression.⁵ Among his friends were Jean Cocteau, Erik Satie, Marc Chagall, and Max Jacob, all of whom belonged after World War I (at the end of which Apollinaire died of influenza, weakened by a head wound received at the front) to the circle which frequented *Le boeuf sur le toit*.⁶ This celebrated

⁵ *Alcools* (1913) was a selection of poems written over the previous fifteen years. It combined classical verse forms with modern imagery, involving transcriptions of street conversations overheard by chance and the absence of punctuation. It opened with the poem 'Zone,' in which the tormented poet wanders through streets after the loss of his mistress. Among its other famous lyrical pieces is 'Le pont Mirabeau.' Some of its poems were inspired by Jacqueline Kolb. Annie Playden, an English governess, inspired the Rhineland piece, 'La chanson du mal-aimé.' For further information, see www.kirjasto.sci.fi/apollina.htm.

And of course one notes the unmistakable and almost overbearing Christian symbolism of "Zone," which intimates something of the intensely Catholic milieu of early twentieth-century France. It seems that no matter what the position (from nihilistic transgression to apostolic exhortation) an intellectual or artist adopted in those days, Catholicism was inevitably close at hand. Also noteworthy is the temptations of paganism and its connection with eroticism, which would preoccupy Georges Bataille (another failed Catholic) for the rest of his life. It is interesting to observe as well that Bataille was at first deeply involved in surrealism until his break with Andre Breton. The scene at the end of *Histoire de l'oeil* involving the mutilation and murder of a Catholic priest is perhaps the most ugly expression of the rage some of these men felt at being not only tied to a Catholic past, but involved in a Catholic present. No wonder so much of this work in transgression is taken up in the search for new gods, in the form of idols and concepts.

⁶ *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*, op. 58 (*The Ox on the Roof*, subtitle *The Nothing-Doing Bar*) is a surrealist ballet. It is based on a score composed by Darius Milhaud that is strongly influenced by Brazilian popular music (the title is that of an old Brazilian tango, one of close to thirty Brazilian tunes quoted in the composition). Originally the piece was to have been the score of a silent Charlie Chaplin film (*Cinéma-fantaisie* for violin and piano). Its transformation into a ballet was the making of the piece, with a scenario by Jean Cocteau, stage designs by Raoul Dufy, and costumes by Guy-Pierre Fauconnet. The choreography was deliberately

eighth-arrondissement cabaret was the place at which Stravinsky and Diaghilev could be seen along with the surrealists, the fauves, poets like Jacob and Paul Claudel—and just about anybody who was anybody among the bohemians of the day.⁷ It played a great role in the “education” of the unattached adolescents of the period—or so we are told by one such who was prominent among those who frequented *Le boeuf*.⁸

The person in question was the above-mentioned teenager Maurice Sachs, a budding novelist who seduced and betrayed in endless succession, and who finished life as a prisoner of the Gestapo, having first worked for them as an agent happy to betray even his friends. On the surface, Sachs was the epitome of the serial double-dealer whose predatory homosexuality began in adolescence, when he was educated in a Parisian English-style boys school, and later led to promiscuous affairs with everyone who mattered—including Gide, Coceatu, and Jacob—as well as with many who did not.⁹ Persuaded by Cocteau in 1925 to embrace Catholicism, Sachs shortly thereafter entered a seminary with a view to becoming a priest. However he shortly left on account of a relapse into promiscuous homosexuality, and seems thereafter to have drifted away from the practice of the Catholic faith, though not from his Catholic friends.¹⁰ Nor did his Catholic friends abandon him. In his acclaimed biography of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, Jean-Luc Barré

very slow, in marked contrast to the lively and joyful spirit of the music. The premiere was given in February 1920 at the Théâtre des Champs Élysées and comprised, besides the ballet, *Adieu New York* by Georges Auric, *Cocardes* by Francis Poulenc and *Trois petites pièces montées* by Erik Satie. The version for chamber orchestra was followed by another for piano duet, subtitled *Cinema Symphony* on South American Airs. Its performance lasts about a quarter of an hour. The ballet gave its name to a well-known Parisian bar-restaurant that opened in 1922. For further information, see www.boeufsurletoit.com.

⁷ Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev (Russian: Серге́й Па́влович Дя́гилев/Sergei Pavlovich Dyagilev), also referred to as Serge (March 31, 1872–August 19, 1929), was a Russian art critic, patron, ballet impresario and founder of the Ballets Russes from which many famous dancers and choreographers would later arise.

⁸ Maurice Sachs, *Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Stein and Day, 1964), 72.

⁹ The school was L'École de l'Isle-de-France, which Sachs referred to in *The Sabbath* as *le college de Luza*.

¹⁰ “Il parlait beaucoup, beaucoup de Paris et en particulier de la Maison Maritain à Meudon. . . . À la fin, nous avons décidé de nous rencontrer à Meudon après la guerre.” “Letter of Richard Hitzler to Raïssa Maritain,” in Maurice Sachs, Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, *Correspondance (1925–1939)*, eds. Michel Bressolette and René Mougel (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 323.

reports that Jacques Maritain as late as 1949 plaintively wondered out loud, "Poor Maurice Sachs, is he dead, is he alive?"¹¹

As will become evident in what follows, Maurice Sachs affords a good example of the second of Scruton's directions—the bohemian. Thanks to his association with André Gide, Sachs also briefly followed the third, the communist, direction.¹² And his attachment to the first or Christian direction may not be as short-lived as many commentators assume. We know, for instance, that from his prison cell at Fuhlsbüttel, a Nazi concentration camp located near Hamburg, Sachs recalled his early association with the Maritains that led to his baptism.¹³ Richard Hitzler, a fellow prisoner at Fuhlsbüttel who, unlike Sachs, survived his internment, reports that, during his final days, Sachs repeatedly expressed the ardent wish that he would be able to return after the war to the Maritains' home at Meudon, which since the spring of 1923 had provided a spiritual gravitational center for the poets, painters, and musicians whom they had met in the company of their own evangelist, Léon Bloy.¹⁴

To appreciate the Maritains' influence on Maurice Sachs, we must examine closely the evolution of their friendship with him. Abandoned by his father at the age of five, Maurice Sachs was brought up in straightened circumstances. "From the time of his teens," writes one author,

the physically unappealing yet highly seductive Sachs, whom [Jean] Cocteau has depicted in his memoirs stuffing his pockets with toilet paper he pretended was money, followed an essentially theatrical calling, an endless getting into character. Sachs has hastily been labeled 'the

¹¹ Jean Luc Barré, *Jacques & Raïssa Maritain: Beggars for Heaven*, trans. Bernard E. Doering (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 405. The book has been favorably reviewed by John F. X. Knasas in *Catholic Historical Review* 93 (2007): 435–36.

¹² His biographer includes a chapter on "Maurice 'communiste.'" See Raczymow, *Maurice Sachs*, 249–56.

¹³ The prison, originally built as a regular prison in 1879, was converted to a satellite concentration camp after the Nazis' takeover of Germany in 1933, when it was placed under the control of the SS and SA. Most of the inmates were anti-Nazi sympathizers, Jews, Jehovah Witnesses, Roma, gays, and others whom the regime wanted to lock up. Over seven hundred people were interned in the camp following Kristallnacht in 1938. "Konzentrationslager Fuhlsbüttel" (Fuhlsbüttel concentration camp) was referred to as "KolaFu" in common parlance and became a synonym for oppression and death through hard labor. Fuhlsbüttel was often an initial point of incarceration for prisoners who were sent on to other camps such as Buchenwald, Neuengamme, Ravensbrück or Sachsenhausen. The camp was liberated in May 1945, by which time over 250 people had been murdered there. A camp memorial has been constructed nearby.

¹⁴ Sachs, *Correspondance*, 23. See also, Barré, *Maritain*, 149ff.

Jean Genet of the twenties,' but the resemblance is superficial, based on their shared combination of homosexuality, thieving, black marketeering, and later fascination with Nazi Germany.¹⁵

This sketch published in *Yale French Studies* represents the standard unsympathetic account of the teenager that the Maritains welcomed into their affections. At the same time, this short description helps us to appreciate Raïssa Maritain's first reaction to Maurice Sachs: "something mysteriously dark," she opined.¹⁶

What follows touches only the high points of the interaction between the Maritains and Maurice Sachs, whose true personal dispositions and intentions, it should become evident, are not always easy to judge. We begin in July 1924, when, at Meudon, Jacques the Evangelist first receives Jean Cocteau, and eventually welcomes his friends, including the eighteen-year-old Maurice Sachs, who in February of the same year, had become one of Cocteau's "secretaries."¹⁷ Twelve months later, August 2, 1925, to be precise, and urged on by Cocteau, Maurice Sachs visits Jacques Maritain in order to pursue instructions in the Catholic faith. Jacques begins with the Trinity.¹⁸ By the end of the month, Maurice receives baptism with Raïssa Maritain as godmother and Jean Cocteau godfather by proxy—Jacques standing in. The place: the private chapel of the Maritains at 10 rue du Parc, Meudon. It is on the same day, August 29, 1925, that we read in Raïssa's *Journal*, "Baptism of Maurice. Still, I am not reassured. This lad has something mysteriously dark about him that makes me ill at ease." Maurice's First Communion and Confirmation by the Bishop of Versailles follow appropriately.¹⁹

His biographer, Henri Raczymow, describes the young Maurice Sachs as an all or nothing man.²⁰ Soon the new convert is thinking about pursuing a priestly vocation, and in the meantime, about taking up temporary residence with the Maritains. Raïssa holds out the advantages of his living with them: The presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament and "la douce

¹⁵ David J. Jacobson, "Jews for Genius: The Unholy Disorders of Maurice Sachs," *Yale French Studies* 85 (1994): 183.

¹⁶ Barré, *Maritain*, 216. See also, Raczymow, *Maurice Sachs*, 58, citing Jacques Maritain, *Journal de Raïssa* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963): "Ce garçon, écrira-t-elle dans son *Journal*, a quelque chose de obscur qui m'inquiète."

¹⁷ Barré, *Maritain*, 180–226, devotes a chapter to the meeting of Maritain and Jean Cocteau titled "God or Jean Cocteau?" See also, Sachs, *Correspondance*, 33 note 1.

¹⁸ Raczymow, *Maurice Sachs*, 101.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁰ "Sachs, c'est toujours tout ou rien" (*ibid.*, 108).

influence de Jacques.”²¹ On January 2, 1926, Maurice enters the Séminaire des Carmes, 21 rue d’Assas, which in 1792 had been the scene of the martyrdom of 115 priests and three bishops.²² The Maritains, Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob, and his peer friend, Jean Bourgoing, support him variously and variously.²³ Maurice perseveres in his vocational resolution for about six and a half months.

With certain allowances, Maurice adapted to the rigorous schedule of the seminary. Jacques Maritain, it is said, helped him to obtain permission to wear the clerical soutane in advance of the usual time. Maurice argued that the cassock would help him sustain the moral requirements of his new vocation, although he later confessed a perverse fascination with the dress-style of the soutane. At the same time, for six months, he made his daily morning meditation, mostly while reading Pascal, and assisted, kneeling, at Mass, even though he later reported in his diary that he suffered from spontaneous movements of the flesh. “But still,” Sachs further recalled, “it is a futile and merely nervous erection when the imagination does not sustain it with any incongruous image; there is no harm in it, at most a certain surprise and embarrassment.”²⁴ Sachs nonetheless goes on to admit that these occurrences caused him “to feel remorse,” and that they led him to ask for permission to serve the Mass, an activity which he imagined would ease his discomfort.

All in all, Maurice’s very first days in the Seminary were not without peace, especially when at the end of the day he came before the Blessed Virgin Mary. “There was no occasion to forget her,” writes Sachs.

It was here that I prayed best, it was here that I *believed* best. Perhaps because it is easier to believe in the Holy Virgin than in God; for she created neither heaven nor earth, but a man in our image; because everything in us believes in her, as all that we are has grown within her, nine months from the day of conception.²⁵

Not bad for a young convert burdened with past disorders and present temptations.

²¹ Letter of Raïssa Maritain to Maurice Sachs, November 19, 1925, Archives Madeleine Castaing, cited in Raczymow, *Maurice Sachs*, 110.

²² The web site reports: “L’accueil du séminaire des Carmes: Durant la Première Guerre mondiale, des séminaristes venus du nord et de l’est de la France sont hébergés dans l’ancien couvent. En 1919, Mgr Verdier y fonde un séminaire universitaire, toujours en fonctionnement aujourd’hui.”

²³ Max Jacob (July 12, 1876–March 5, 1944) was a French poet, painter, writer, and critic. He too was a convert to Catholicism.

²⁴ Maurice Sachs, *Witches’ Sabbath*, 128–29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 132, original emphasis.

Seminary discipline soon taxed the immature virtuous dispositions of the young Maurice. After two months of presumably good willed endeavor, he began to think of his cell as a “chamber of horrors and demons.”²⁶ Old deep-seated habits, including losing struggles with masturbation, recurred: “I groaned in my solitude; I ran to the chapel, the garden, returned, knelt, got up again, fell back, started up, and finally sank down, beaten, into my lacerating pleasures.”²⁷ Neither the ascetical practices of the period, which included using the discipline and other instruments of physical penance, nor the more humane suggestion of Jacques Maritain that he take up a minimum amount of apostolic activity—which Maritain, one assumes, rightly considered would put the still teenager, “M. Le Cure Maurice Sachs,” into living contact with other persons—were sufficient to calm his unholy desires.

Then came the summer vacation months of 1926 when the diocesan seminarians were allowed to return to their families. Maurice left with his maternal grandmother Alice Bizet—sometime daughter-in-law of the composer Georges—for the French Riviera. The devil was waiting for him, as Jacques Maritain, who took the time to escort grandmother and grandson to the Gare de Lyon, may have instinctually anticipated.

“I had come in utter innocence of heart,” Maurice later pleaded with his reader to believe in faith.²⁸ Still, the highly charged atmosphere of the beach side resort, Juan-les-Pins, quickly overpowered this all too recently converted habitué of *le beau monde*. The young American writer Glenway Wescott, who would later become a familiar figure in the New York artistic and gay community, introduced Maurice to a teenage boy named Tom Pinkerton, who was then vacationing with his high-strung mother on the Côte d’Azur.²⁹ Infatuation developed first, followed by what may have been a mutual seduction. “We succumbed to the exhaustion of our

²⁶ Ibid., 135.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 140–41.

²⁹ As a writer, Glenway Wescott (1901–1987) left behind a series of novels, including *The Grandmothers* and *The Pilgrim Hawk*, noted for their remarkable lyricism. As a literary figure, Wescott also became a symbol of his times. Born on a Wisconsin farm in 1901, he associated as a young writer with Hemingway, Stein, and Fitzgerald in 1920s Paris and subsequently was a central figure in New York’s artistic and gay communities. Though he couldn’t finish a novel after the age of forty-five, he was just as famous as an arts impresario, as a diarist, and for the company he kept: W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Marianne Moore, Somerset Maugham, E. M. Forster, Joseph Campbell, and scores of other luminaries. See Jerry Rosco, *Glenway Wescott Personally: A Biography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

forces of resistance but took no pleasure in doing so," Maurice later wrote, perhaps tendentiously.³⁰ The public scandal caused by Maurice's sudden preoccupation with the sixteen-year-old Tom was enough to make the recently repentant Cocteau react strongly, and to insist that Maurice return immediately to Paris. Once back at the seminary, the priest who had baptized him the year before counseled: "Better make a good Christian than a bad priest."³¹ In November 1926, Maurice left the seminary to fulfill his military service. From his military barracks, he wrote to Jacques on November 23, 1926, recounting his religious practices: "The only thing is that there is no Mass, but I make my stations of the cross while walking up to the stables which are two kilometers away, and I make my meditation while combing my horse."³²

After finishing his military service in April 1928, Maurice took on literary projects, eventually left for the United States where he opened an art gallery, married the daughter of a New York Presbyterian minister (whom he thereafter shortly abandoned), and subsequently took up a relationship with a young man, Henry Wibbels, in California. In March 1933, he encountered Jacques Maritain in Chicago. Later that same year Maurice returned to France. In 1939, Sachs was assigned to the commander of the British troops in Caen, then in 1942, he impulsively volunteered for service in Germany, where he briefly worked in 1943 for the Gestapo, that is, before he was arrested and sent to the Fuhlsbüttel concentration camp.³³ Even his work as an informer betrayed his conflicted state of soul: "Though willing," reports one authority, "to turn in other resistance workers, he refused for example, to hand over a Jesuit priest."³⁴ Maurice perished toward the end of the war, perhaps on a forced march. His death certificate is dated April 14, 1945.

The Maritains' "Intemperate Zeal"

The above account of Maurice Sachs's life largely follows the account of his biographer, Henri Raczymow, complemented with excerpts from Sach's own "illusionist" autobiographical essay, *Le Sabbat*, translated as

³⁰ Sachs, *Witches' Sabbath*, 142.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Seulement pas de messe, mais je fais mon chemin de croix en montant à pied aux écuries qui sont à deux km. et ma méditation en étrillant mon cheval." See Sachs, *Correspondance*, 183.

³³ His biographer speculates that the decision to go to Hamburg may have been made for no reason more profound than the "l'impatience de *changer d'air*." See Raczymow, *Maurice Sachs*, 410.

³⁴ Jacobson, "Jews for Genius," 198.

Witches' Sabbath.³⁵ In 2003, Michel Bressolette and René Mougel published an edition of the known correspondence between Sachs and the Maritains. The letters, cards, and telegrams date from 1925 to 1939, the year that Maurice disappears into the fog of the Second World War. So we have a privileged vantage point from which to inquire about what transpired between the Maritains and this young Jewish convert whom today some would say suffered from deep-seated same-sex tendencies. Secular studies of Sachs take for granted his dominant sexual preferences; they have a more difficult time granting the authenticity of his conversion to Catholicism, still less of accepting it as something permanent. The *Correspondance*, on the other hand, raises questions about these assumptions. Maurice after all had fallen under the sway of the Maritains' "intemperate zeal."³⁶

In his first letter to Jacques, dated July 28, 1925, the nineteen-year-old Maurice states things clearly: "Nothing concerns me more than Baptism. I regret the years empty of faith that are behind me."³⁷ As the days pass, the exchanges between Maurice and each of the Maritains intensify both in rhythm and spiritual density. On August 13, 1925, Raïssa quotes to him large chunks of the Liturgy for the feast of the Assumption—"les Anges se réjouissent de son Assomption et ils en louent le Fils de Dieu."³⁸ Maurice replies appreciatively, although it is clear that he has not yet completed his mystagogy: "I am accustoming myself," he writes, "to fear no longer the Church in her exterior rituals."³⁹ Again, Maurice acknowledges the satisfaction he found in reading the copy of the *Imitation of Christ* that the Maritains sent him. Though at the same time, he writes revealingly:

I do not have to confess the sins of the catechism, but I must fortify my heart against the human affections that suddenly surge into my heart like gushing water. They upset the calm blood that passes tranquilly through our arteries when we love only God and those who are like us in this love.⁴⁰

Certain of Maurice's human affections center on, among others, Jacques Maritain who reminds him of images of Christ and on Jean Cocteau,

³⁵ See Barré, *Maritain*, 208ff.

³⁶ Barré, *Maritain*, 205. The conversions for which the Maritains were instrumental did not win the admiration of all, even of the ecclesiastical authorities.

³⁷ Sachs, *Correspondance*, 33.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 49, 50, my translation.

whose initials are the same as those of Christ's—J. C.⁴¹ Then there is the figure of Jean Bourgoingt, who on March 11, 1966 would die a Cistercian monk, caring for lepers in the Cameroon.⁴² He was Maurice's peer and one of Cocteau's epebes, whom Maurice later introduced to Le Père Pressoir, the seminary priest who would soon baptize Maurice and later serve as his spiritual guide.

From the day of Maurice's baptism through the rest of 1925, the exchange of letters between Maurice and the Maritains continues steadily. Even the editor of their correspondence is constrained to remark: "Mystère des lettres et leur rapidité, 29 sept. 7 h moins 1/4."⁴³ All in all, these accelerated communications reflect the struggles of a young man exposed suddenly to the highest forms of Catholic spiritual doctrine, including a compendium of the entire mystical doctrine of St. John of the Cross, and at the same time trying to understand how the baptism which gave him every grace of the Christian life still leaves him uncertain of himself. "My spirit is weak, distracted, and sometimes tepid," he writes to his "très chers et doux amis," "and my body is sometimes shaken up by the demon."⁴⁴ Maurice also writes individually to Raïssa and Jacques. Each in turn replies. Sometimes on the same day. For instance on October 20, 1925, when Jacques briefly reminds Maurice of his prayerful sentiments, and suggests that he send a letter to Fribourg, Switzerland.

After hearing High Mass at Notre Dame, Maurice exclaims: "It's the only possible environment. One must be either a poet or a priest. Jacques is both, but he is a miracle."⁴⁵ A Catholic comprehension develops in Maurice. On November 2, 1925, he asks his Godmother to pray for his grandfather, Jacques Bizet, whose anniversary of death falls on the next day. As November draws to a close, Maurice, who has decided to move in with the Maritains, cries out, "My God, I can't wait to live at Meudon. What better preparation than to sleep under your chapel and to pray for long times in your house which is the House of God."⁴⁶ December interrupts the rhythm of letters. Maurice is living with Jacques and Raïssa. By January 4, 1926, Maurice again takes up his correspondence with the Maritains. Now from the seminary, *des Carmes*.

⁴¹ Maurice to the Maritains, "Letter of 6 August 1925," in Sachs, *Correspondance*, 35.

⁴² For further information on Jean Bourgoingt, see Jean Bourgoingt (Frère Pascal), *Le Retour de l'enfant terrible: Lettres, 1923–1966*, ed. Jean Hugo and Jean Mouton (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1975); and Georges Lauris, *Itinéraire d'un enfant terrible. De Cocteau à Cîteaux* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1998).

⁴³ Letter 23, in Sachs, *Correspondance*, 62.

⁴⁴ Sachs, *Correspondance*, 66.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

During the first month, the letters from the seminary reveal the interests of Maurice's life, his personal relationships, including Raïssa's sister, Vera, and their mother, who of course live with the Maritains, his efforts to begin a spiritual life, especially of prayer, and his concern to settle affairs left over from his former life, such as the payment of debts. Something of the emotionally immature and of the mawkishly sentimental inform these letters—such as the hand drawn sketch that depicts his friends on a field of roses and stars.⁴⁷ At the same time, Maurice reports on his careful reading of Jacques's books as they appear, for example, on February 13, 1926, *Éléments de philosophie (Premier Fascicule)*. On March 7, the old feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, Maurice sends a poem on a home-made card decorated with religious symbols. By the end of the month however, he writes to his dear friends: "I am very weak. What now! God gave me a little of his Cross and I let it down."⁴⁸

On the Monday of Holy Week, Maurice writes in order to borrow 660 francs from Jacques. Maurice was in the habit of visiting the Maritains and his other Paris friends when his seminary schedule allowed, and he did so on the following Easter Sunday. By June 6, Raïssa is constrained to remind him: "It is not without cruel struggles that nature cedes to grace." By the middle of July 1926, after passing some days of retreat at Solesmes, "where he cried for the first time in six years," Maurice is moved to consider a Benedictine vocation as the only way to ensure his perseverance.⁴⁹ The Maritains continue to support the young seminarian by giving sound spiritual advice, by assuring him of their personal support, and on the part of his Godmother, Raïssa, by offering a womanly expression of understanding and consolation.

Even while on vacation, Maurice still writes "home." The first letter from Juan-les-Pins is written on the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene. Three days later, on the feast of Saint James, Maurice writes to Jacques: "Thank you, thank you for all that you have done for me. My heart is full of gratitude for you, for you James the Apostle."⁵⁰ On July 31, the feast of St. Ignatius, "How beautiful will be the day of my ordination; I will be able to bless you as my heart blesses you."⁵¹ On the Vigil of the Assumption, Maurice sends a post card from Lerins. Next on 22 August, he writes, "I prayed this morning to ask God for all the graces of conversion

⁴⁷ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 121.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 149.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 151.

⁵¹ Ibid., 153.

that we hope for, by the intercession of our Mother.”⁵² From these external signs, Maurice’s Marian and liturgical spirituality appears in order. He expresses himself as one would expect from a seminarian of the period, even while on vacation.

Then arises the storm. On August 29, 1926, Maurice writes to Jacques as to a secular father confessor, and he tells him that since four days he has lived in horrible disarray and deception: “I am taking the only remedy. I am leaving here tomorrow for Solesmes. There, I hope to gain my composure.”⁵³ Maurice had met Tom Pinkerton. “Pray Jesus that he will humble me and that he will bend me. I belong to Him, and still all of me wants to be elsewhere. . . . Write!”⁵⁴ It would be difficult to overlook the conflicted state of Maurice’s soul. The rational in Maurice reaches out for truthful counsel from the “apostle” who had guided him to Catholic faith. His emotional powers however are captivated by other, less reliable forces.

Things did not improve for Maurice. After he had both finished another stay at Solesmes and spent some time at Meudon, Jacques is obliged to write on October 1, 1926, a sharp letter of admonition: “The Maurice of before, we did not know. This time, during the few days that you spent at Meudon, we met him. He and the Christian Maurice were at the same time before us, creating together an unhappy peace.”⁵⁵ This exercise in fraternal correction displays a masterful expression of both spiritual paternity and spiritual direction. Jacques spared no effort to curb the waywardness that he rightly recognized as recapturing the soul of Maurice Sachs. Like a father, Jacques explained the classical teaching on repentance: “Your life from before has left profound marks in you that only a long practice of the most strict Christian life is able to erase.”⁵⁶ Later the same month, Maurice writes confidentially to Jacques, informing him that he has seen “the young American,” though without committing a carnal sin. But this *affaire* is not finished. For two months now, my heart has been aching, admits Maurice.

Maurice spends time at another French Benedictine monastery, Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, along with his old friend Max Jacobs (+1944), whose religious conversion achieved stability with his retirement to Benedictine life.⁵⁷

⁵² Ibid., 155.

⁵³ Ibid., 156–57.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 165.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 167.

⁵⁷ “Jacob converted to Christianity in 1909 and became a Roman Catholic in 1915, but he nevertheless continued to oscillate between extravagant penitence and

“Jacques,” Maurice writes, “I am not doing well.”⁵⁸ Again on November 5, Maurice tells Jacques that he vows not to have sexual relations with Tom Pinkerton, who is not homosexual, but at the same time allows that he cannot live without his friendship altogether. Maurice sends Tom the *Imitation*, and he encourages him to return to the practice of the faith. He also warns Tom to escape the “constant torment that homosexuality is.”⁵⁹ This long letter written from Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire expresses clearly Maurice’s at least unconscious identification with what St. Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans: “For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” (Rom 7:22–23).⁶⁰ Or, to cite a text of the Second Vatican Council that may apply to Maurice, “And being weak and sinful, they frequently do what they would rather not, and fail to do what they would.”⁶¹

Theological Analysis

It is possible to interpret the personal and epistolary exchanges between the Maritains and Maurice Sachs within the context of the “vocational teleology” that dominates the first chapter of the 1993 encyclical letter, *Veritatis Splendor*. Pope John Paul II there appeals to the dialogue of Jesus with the rich young man as related in the nineteenth chapter of Saint Matthew’s Gospel. “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life” (Mt 9:16)? “Because God is there,” Raïssa wrote early on to a young Maurice worried about his conversion, “you have nothing to fear. I do not say, you have nothing to do, that would be to miss what is apparent. ‘If you love me, keep my commandments.’”⁶² Maurice, it seems difficult to deny, was an earnest searcher, at least for a time.

The Maritains embraced him and their other “guests” from the perspective of the overarching participation of the rational creature in the divine goodness. “L’infinie Bonté de Notre Seigneur.”⁶³ They acted toward

wild bohemianism until 1921, at which time he retired into semi-monastic seclusion at Saint Benoît-sur-Loire. He lived there most of the time, supporting himself by painting, until World War II, when he was interned in the concentration camp at Drancy, near Paris, where he died.” See the website concise.britannica.com/ebc/article-9043189/Max-Jacob

⁵⁸ Sachs, *Correspondance*, 172.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 173–77, no. 119.

⁶¹ See Vatican Council II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*), §10.

⁶² Sachs, *Correspondance*, 45.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Maurice based on their conviction that, as St. Thomas teaches, “each creature is stretched out toward the attainment of its own perfection, which is a likeness of the divine perfection and goodness.”⁶⁴ In other words, the Maritains pursued their evangelizing efforts inspired by a confidence that the basic dynamisms of creation flow from the divine will from which all striving for perfection derives. *Veritatis Splendor* repeats this key interpretative principle of Thomist moral theology:

The moral life has an essential “teleological” character, since it consists in the deliberate ordering of human acts to God, the supreme Good and ultimate end (*telos*) of man. This is attested to once more by the question posed by the young man to Jesus: “What good must I do to have eternal life?”⁶⁵

The encyclical further reminds us, “Only God can answer the question about what is good, because he is the Good itself.”⁶⁶ Or, as Raïssa wrote in 1925 to Maurice, “Only the Good God, in effect, is able to begin, continue, and accomplish the work of our sanctification.”⁶⁷

Maurice received instruction in both nature and grace. Adoptive sonship is prefigured by a more limited likeness of God in the created nature, which as St. Thomas also teaches, becomes fuller as it approaches the absolute expression of the divine sonship.⁶⁸ The adoptive sonship of the Christian is not a sonship that is simply and univocally natural as is that of Christ who is the eternal Word. Rather, there exists within human nature—which is specifically different from the divine nature—an analogical likeness to God that is able to undergo transfiguration. This may be expressed in an analogy of proper proportionality: Christ the natural Son is to the Father as the adoptive son is to the Trinity. Love for the full truth of man’s divine good can surmount the difficulties that human weakness and a fallen world create. Only the man whose operational capacities are conformed to Christ through the infused theological and moral virtues will love as does Christ. Maurice had come to understand that the goal of life is to become like Christ. As late as August 1927, he tells Jacques that he wants to include an image of the Shroud of Turin in a book of

⁶⁴ See *Summa theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 4: “Et unaquaeque creatura intendit consequi suam perfectionem, quae est similitudo perfectionis et bonitatis divinae.”

⁶⁵ *Veritatis Splendor*, §72.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, §9.

⁶⁷ Sachs, *Correspondance*, 45.

⁶⁸ See *ST* I, q. 33, a. 3. Also, my “Sonship, Sacrifice, and Satisfaction: The Divine Friendship in Aquinas and the Renewal of Christian Anthropology,” *Letter & Spirit* 3 (2007): 69–91.

poems that he intends to publish, with the title, the “Miraculous Sketch of Jesus.”⁶⁹ And of course, he found in Jacques himself a living resemblance of how Maurice envisaged the Savior. His personal embrace of Christ raises other questions. While trying to rationalize an acceptable relationship with Tom Pinkerton, Maurice wrote to Jacques: “I think about God with fear and revolt.”⁷⁰

If Maurice Sachs today were to seek entrance into a Catholic seminary, he would have to confront the directives for persons with same-sex tendencies set down by the 2005 “Instruction” of the Congregation for Catholic Education.⁷¹ Grace is called to stand before the psychological tribunal. It is useless to engage in historical psychoanalysis. At the same time, it is evident from the *Correspondance* that the Maritains did not hesitate to regard Maurice’s baptism as the start of a new life. In doing this, they clearly drew on classical Catholic teaching about the “rich reality” that baptismal grace bestows.⁷² How then did they regard what in Maurice today would be called “deep-seated homosexual tendencies”? Three points emerge:

1. First, the Maritains refused to hypostasize homosexuality. Note in the 2005 “Instruction” that the use of the word “tendency” to describe homosexual leanings is meant to signal that while the Church considers “homosexual tendencies” distelic and therefore incapable of perfecting human nature, such tendencies are not as close to the appetites as natural inclinations. In Catholic moral thought, there exists only one sexual inclination, only one sexual orientation. It should be noted that the “Instruction” of 2005 speaks of *tendencies* that are “objectively disordered.”⁷³ The terminology is that of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.⁷⁴ On the other hand, when discussing the moral anthropology of Catholic life, *Veritatis Splendor* employs the word “inclination” seven times. The word “tendency” however appears only

⁶⁹ Sachs, *Correspondance*, 215.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders” (2005).

⁷² See CCC, §1279: “that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes and adoptive son of the father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit.”

⁷³ Congregation for Catholic Education, “Instruction,” §2.

⁷⁴ CCC, §2358: “Virorum et mulierum numerus non exiguus *tendentias homosexuales praesentat profunde radictas*,” emphases added.

once, and then to describe a trend of thought not a psychological state. The Maritains read correctly Maurice's human and religious inclinations. They were less successful, it seems, in comprehending his disordered and predominately homosexual tendencies.

Veritatis Splendor employs twice the adjective "disordered" to describe sinful actions. The *Catechism* cites the 1976 "Persona Humana" document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (issued during the height of the sexual revolution in North America). It defines homosexual acts as intrinsically disordered.⁷⁵ Disordered tendencies to commit such acts describe psychological dispositions toward sin. The theological word would be "temptation."⁷⁶ In any case, the Church does not locate homosexual lust at the level of being.

The Maritains obviously viewed Maurice's past profligacy as something altogether remediable. They believed in the forgiveness of all personal sins that baptism brings. They knew what Aquinas teaches about the *fomes peccati*. In short, temptations after baptism should be overcome by manfully resisting them by the grace of Jesus Christ.⁷⁷ We can infer the gist of their spiritual counsel from what Maurice plaintively says when his struggles with presumably sexual temptations had led to discouragement. In a 1927 letter, Maurice complains to Jacques: "You tell me that God wants me to play the hero. But what thanks should I give God who permitted that my heart and my body be perverted at an age when one is ignorant, and who ten years later requires heroism of me?"⁷⁸ "Manfully resist." "Play the hero."

2. The Maritains brooked no sympathy for any chosen expression of homosexual lust. Aquinas never discusses explicitly homosexual tendencies. He alludes to what since the late nineteenth century we call homosexuality in the treatise on the old law where he notes that the sixth commandment forbids the "vices against nature" and cites Leviticus 19:16: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination."⁷⁹ He mentions the same "vice against nature" in the reply to an objection in the treatise on the natural law.⁸⁰ Again,

⁷⁵ CCC, §2357, citing *Persona Humana*, §8: "actus homosexualitatis suapte intrinseca natura esse inordinatos."

⁷⁶ For an interesting essay that mentions classical outlooks on sexual temptations, see John Joseph Williams, "Ordered and Disordered Friendships: Some Classic Distinctions," *Faith & Reason* 29 (2004): 33–47.

⁷⁷ CCC, §1264.

⁷⁸ Sachs, *Correspondance*, 228.

⁷⁹ ST I–II, q. 100, a. 11.

⁸⁰ ST I–II, q. 94, a. 3.

“homosexuality” appears in the treatise on intemperance, where Aquinas discusses the shamefulness of homosexual coitus.⁸¹ And again, when he is discussing the sins of lust.⁸² All sins of lechery go against reason, but some—what Mary Ann Glendon likes to call the filthy five—also go against nature; they are not only against reason but also *contra naturam*: masturbation, bestiality, sodomy, contraception, and fetishes.

The first mention of sodomy in the *Summa theologiae* comes, however, when Aquinas discusses pleasure. In this article, the Common Doctor offers what may be the closest thing to clinical psychology in the *Summa*, namely, that some men are sick of soul and so take pleasure in cannibalism, bestiality, homosexual congress, and other things not in accord with their nature.⁸³ Do such persons act from an innate inclination to find pleasure in practicing the vices against nature? It would come as a surprise to discover that the Maritains thought so. There is no evidence to think that Aquinas did. There are persons who take pleasure habitually in bad sex. Maurice seems to have been one of them. He shared his bed with men up until his arrest in 1943. Does the word “tendency” adequately describe his condition? Perhaps. Then there is the testimony of Maurice himself: “My life is impossible because I love *equally* virtue and sin, God and the devil.”⁸⁴ In other words, he explains himself in terms of a choice.

3. The Maritains believed in the power of contemplation to pacify the lower powers of the soul. What distinguishes deep-seated homosexual tendencies from, as the “Instruction” puts it, “homosexual tendencies that were only the expression of a transitory problem”?⁸⁵ It is important to determine criteria to answer this question. Those who experience the latter may be admitted today into seminaries. Others may not. It seems to me that if we follow the lead of Aquinas, then we will find ourselves obliged to discover a way to evaluate the pleasure that an individual takes in the prospects or realization of

⁸¹ ST II–II, 142, a. 4.

⁸² ST II–II, q. 154, a. 11.

⁸³ ST I–II, q. 31, a. 8.

⁸⁴ Sachs, *Correspondance*, 267. This reminds one of an aphorism from *The Way* (#24): “You tell me that in your heart you have fire and water, cold and heat, empty passions and God: one candle lit to St. Michael and another to the devil. Calm yourself. As long as you are willing to fight there are not two candles burning in your heart. There is only one: the archangel’s.”

⁸⁵ Congregation for Catholic Education, “Instruction,” §2.

sexual congress with a person of the same sex. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that many of them find their situations a trial—"pro maiore eorum parte constituit probationem."⁸⁶ We find ourselves back to Maurice Sachs and his advice to Tom Pinkerton: at all costs, escape the "constant torment that homosexuality is."⁸⁷ For their part, the Maritains proceeded on a premise that Aquinas enunciates in *Summa theologiae* I-II, question 38: "The contemplation of truth is the greatest of all pleasures. We have seen that every pleasure assuages pain. The contemplation of truth therefore assuages pain; and it does so the more, the more perfectly one loves wisdom."⁸⁸ How else may one interpret the words of Raïssa? "God will make known to you interiorly and little by little what he desires of you. And little by little, and sweetly, he will teach you how to remain strong by his love."⁸⁹

Postscript

Maurice continued to exchange letters with the Maritains during his period of military service. He also continued for a time to practice the Catholic faith. He reported back to the Maritains on conversations with his confessor, who advised him to marry. . . . And so one assumes that "the torment of homosexuality" remained an issue for Maurice. On November 20, 1927, he writes to Jacques, and confesses to some form of relationship with a certain Jean Mangüe that had the same effect on Maurice's desire to marry as what had happened at Juan-les-Pins had on his desire for the priesthood. "A brutal warning," he tells Jacques.⁹⁰

Marry, we know however, Maurice did. But his struggles with homosexual impulses continued. They eventually took a toll on his religious practice. "But you know better than I," he writes to Jacques in April 1934, "how essential is the Eucharist, which I cannot receive without a firm purpose of not living in a manner that St. Paul condemns."⁹¹ Jacques agrees, and the next month tells him that if a firm purpose is impossible, there is nothing else to do except to wait, while still doing all that is in one's power.⁹² The last letter that Maurice writes is addressed to Raïssa Maritain, shortly before Christmas 1939. Sin appears to have worked its

⁸⁶ CCC, §2358.

⁸⁷ Sachs, *Correspondance*, 174.

⁸⁸ ST I-II, q. 38, a. 5.

⁸⁹ Sachs, *Correspondance*, 45.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 226.

⁹¹ Ibid., 291.

⁹² Ibid., 292.

sad effect. "I am born, it seems to me, without the sense of the eternal. . . . I remain indifferent toward life eternal. *Mille et mille affections*. Maurice."⁹³

On November 16, 1943, Maurice Sachs was arrested by the Gestapo under the pretext of article 175, the section of criminal law that condemned the practice of acts "against nature." Ordinarily, those who, like Maurice Sachs, served as agents for the Nazi government were exempt from this law, except when the Gestapo found reason to lose confidence in them. This they did in the case of Maurice when they discovered that he had alerted a Jesuit priest, le Père Jean Nicot, who was working undercover in Hamburg with the help of the Swiss consulate. Illusionist accounts of his death circulated after the end of World War II. On February 4, 1951, Karl-Ludwig Schneider published an article in the Berlin magazine, *Welt am Sonntag*, proving that Maurice Ettinghausen (Sachs's real family name) had been killed by a Flemish S.S. officer while trying to escape a prison march. On April 21, 1951, his mother had a funeral Mass celebrated for him at Saint-Philippe-du-Roule in Paris. N V

⁹³ Ibid., 312.