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Inter-cultural Spatial Perception--the Case Of Malaya

Miriam K. Lo-lim

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FROM "SOLITUDE" TO SOLIDARITY IN BERNANOS' FICTION

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Vitally interested in the many facets of evil linked to human experience, Bernanos is especially drawn to the problem of human "solitude" that afflicts both "saints" and sinners in his fiction. His sinners become alienated through spiritual and moral degradation. The "solitude" they experience is characterized by a sensation of emptiness, the agony of despair, at the withdrawal of God from their lives. Duped into believing that Satan is all powerful and that salvation for them is impossible, these tortured creatures frequently revolt against the world and God. Driven to acts of violence that include rape, suicide and even murder, they seem doomed to damnation.

The "saints" too are afflicted with "solitude", though it is of a radically different nature. Dedicated to God, yet living in a corrupt world concerned mainly with material values, the "saints" are treated with suspicion and hostility. Their "solitude" derives mainly from the misery of sinners around them. However, the sublime Christian virtues they cultivate, their love for God and for their fellow men, protect them from Satan's temptation of despair, preserve their purity of heart and keep them in communion with God.

Bernanos realizes that Christ redeemed the world by His "solitude" on the Cross. He therefore repeatedly reconciles his sinners with the Creator, suggesting some sort of mysterious pattern linking individual "solitude" to human solidarity in God.

First I analyzed the images through which Bernanos creates an atmosphere of "solitude" that often expresses the tragic destiny of

his characters. I then undertook a systematic study of alienation as portrayed in each of the three categories of sinners: "Les Médiocres", "les enfants humiliés" and the egomaniacs. Next, I examined the evidence provided in Bernanos' writing for linking the "solitude" of his characters to his preoccupation with the Christian dogma of the Communion of Saints that is at the heart of his vision of The Church and his personal view of sanctity.

A very firm link is established between the destinies of his "saints" and those sinners reconciled with God. Through the common suffering of "solitude" shared by "saints" and sinners alike, each is permitted to participate in the Divine Agony and thus play a part in the Redemption.

The three main avenues along which the writer moves his characters towards reunion with God are the Church, the "saints" and the operation of the Communion of Saints.

There is therefore a very distinct progression from "solitude" to solidarity in Bernanosian fiction.

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INTRODUCTION

Bernanos, "solitude" and solidarity

In examining the problem of human "solitude" and its solution of human solidarity and co-operation in God that emerge in the fiction of Georges Bernanos it would seem prudent to take as a starting point one of the author's own statements that suggests the meaning of these two themes. Especially revealing are the following lines which Bernanos wrote in 1936 on the dedicatory page of La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette:

Dès les premières pages de ce récit le nom familier de Mouchette s'est imposé à moi si naturellement qu'il m'a été dès lors impossible de le changer. La Mouchette de la "Nouvelle Histoire" n'a de commun avec celle du "Soleil de Satan" que la même tragique solitude où je les ai vues toutes deux vivre et mourir. A l'une et à l'autre que Dieu fasse miséricorde!¹

The two characters compared here, that is, the Mouchette of Sous le Soleil de Satan published in 1926, and the Mouchette of La Nouvelle Histoire written in 1936, may be said to span the whole range of Bernanosian characterization. Though it is true that the last chapter of Monsieur Ouine would be written only in 1940, it is also true that with this one exception La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette concludes Bernanos' novels just as L'histoire de Mouchette

¹ Georges Bernanos, Oeuvres Romanesques suivies de Dialogues Des Carmélites, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), Préface par Gaëton Picon. Texte et Variantes établis par Albert Béguin. Notes par Michel Estève, p. 1263.

N.B. All references to the novels of Bernanos and to his play, Les Dialogues des Carmélites, correspond with the above Pléiade edition of the Oeuvres Romanesques.

began them as the first section of Sous le soleil de Satan. Thus when we are told that the "tragique solitude" is common to the life and death of the two heroines and that the author hopes that God may grant mercy to them both, the reader is confronted with both a backward glance and an evaluation on the part of the author.

We learn from a study of the two Mouchettes that this "tragique solitude" is responsible for leading them both towards the evil of suicide and hence, it would appear, towards Satan and damnation. Yet such a conclusion would seem to contradict the statement that both are commended to the mercy of God which implies a destiny of salvation. What then is the significance of "solitude"? How may we define its nature and its limitations?

Upon analysis of the characters who people the fiction of Bernanos, "tragique solitude" is seen to appear frequently as the profound suffering that orients an individual either to lead a life dominated by Satan or to opt in favour of an existence devoted to God, suggesting an infusion of grace. It also stands for a sort of spiritual blight, as well as for the putrescence and decay associated with Satan, the corrupt enemy who unleashes it. "Solitude", engendered by sin, is not only present within man, but has corrupted the whole Creation as well, as the curé of Fenouille warns his parishioners in Monsieur Ouine: "Le mal était déjà en vous, mais il s'est mis comme à sortir de la terre, des murs."¹ By its destruction of man's faculty for love, sin translates the absence of God, the source of love. We note that even Satan forsakes

¹ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1487.

the sinner, as the parish priest stresses the misery of man's loneliness:

Et voilà que le diable lui-même s'est retiré de vous.
 Ah! que nous sommes seuls dans le mal, mes frères!
 Les pauvres hommes, de siècle en siècle rêvent de
 rompre cette solitude--là--peine perdue! ... D'ici
 la fin du monde, il faudra que le pécheur pêche
 seul, toujours seul--nous pécherons seuls, comme
 on meurt. Le diable, voyez-vous, c'est l'ami qui
 ne reste jamais jusqu'au bout...¹

Left to his own devices, without the protection and love of God, man is doomed to live in an atmosphere that breeds suspicion, fear and hostility: "Vous vous éliez soupçonnés, calomniés, dénoncés, haïs les uns les autres,..."² These attitudes frequently find expression in madness, suicide and the crime of murder.

The result of original sin, "solitude" neither changes nor develops throughout Bernanos' work. The writer's statement that his first and last Mouchette experience "la même tragique solitude",³ indicates clearly that there is no evolution in his concept of this malady.

The Bernanosian world is one in which sin and grace are particularly active. The alternatives appear to be simple and clear cut; souls either accept or refuse the love of God and therefore man's destiny is either to win salvation or to gain eternal damnation. In the distinctly supernatural perspective of the writer, where everything is visualized between the Fall and the Redemption, Bernanos' "tragique solitude" cannot therefore be limited to imply the pain of loneliness on a social level. Rather, it signifies the agony of despair that

¹
Ibid., p. 1490.

²
Ibid., p. 1490.

³
 Georges Bernanos, La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, p. 1263.

arises out of the separation of an individual from God.

Yet there are certain instances when "solitude" signifies the pain that isolation from society brings and is no doubt a symptom of one's separation from God. In Sous le Soleil de Satan, the fear of being exiled from her community, of being abandoned by everyone, fills Germaine Malorthy with the torment of despair when the secret of her unlawful pregnancy is discovered. These are the thoughts that course through her mind:

... "Plus personne..." Des mots entendus, elle ne retenait que ceux-là. Seule ... abandonnée, découronnée, retombée... Seule dans le troupeau commun ... Que craindre au monde, sinon la solitude et l'ennui? Que craindre sinon cette maison sans joie?¹

The heroine of La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette experiences the same kind of "solitude" at finding herself entirely abandoned by both family and villagers after the death of her mother. This is how Bernanos describes her pitiful state of dejection:

"Elle est seule, vraiment seule aujourd'hui, contre tous."²

"Solitude" is a term frequently used in the primary sense, conveying the idea of seclusion, isolation and remoteness. In association with setting, it forms part of the writer's technique of expressing "solitude" on the social level.

More often than not however, Bernanosian "solitude" is analogous in some respects to the suffering of alienation from God

1

Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 73.

2

Georges Bernanos, La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, p. 1371.

that Dostoevsky presents in his Notes from the Underground. One can best understand so personal an interpretation of "solitude" by recognizing the significance of Christianity as an influence informing both the author's life and work.

In Bernanos' artistic vision, as in his life as a Christian, God is to be regarded as the sole absolute, the Creator and Ruler of the Universe. Without Him, the life of man becomes empty and meaningless as the writer himself testifies in a letter to abbé Lagrange as early as 1905:

je reconnais plus que jamais que la vie,
même avec la gloire,...est une chose
vide et sans saveur quand on n'y mêle
pas, toujours, absolument, Dieu. D'où il
m'apparaît logiquement que, pour être
heureux, il faut vivre et mourir pour lui,
aidant à ce que son règne arrive selon
votre âge, selon votre position, vos moyens,
votre fortune, vos goûts.¹

In his work we see the soul of twentieth century man diseased and despiritualized: "L'humanité tout entière est malade."² Bernanos will diagnose the nature of man's misfortune: "La déchristianisation de l'Europe s'est faite peu à peu. L'Europe s'est déchristianisée comme un organisme se dévitaminise."³ In many respects, the portrait parallels the condition of man unregenerate as described in the epistles of St. Paul and in the Confessions of St. Augustine.

¹
Georges Bernanos, Oeuvres Romanesques, "Lettres à l'abbé Lagrange", p. 1727.

²
Georges Bernanos, La liberté pour quoi faire? (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 146.

³
Ibid., p. 142.

The author of Les Grands cimetières sous la lune explains that man's failure to build his existence on a foundation of faith is one of the root causes of the crisis threatening him:

Faute de vivre votre foi, votre foi n'est plus vivante, elle est devenue abstraite, elle s'est comme désincarnée. Peut-être trouverons-nous dans cette désincarnation du Verbe la vraie cause de nos malheurs.¹

Bernanos therefore recognizes that "l'essence de notre malheur est surnaturelle."² He specifically defines it as the supernatural void left in the soul of man at the withdrawal of God from his life:

"ce que vous appelez le mal, n'est qu'une absence. La place vide laissée dans l'homme ainsi que l'empreinte du cachet dans la cire."³

For example, a sinner like M. Ouine is filled with remorse at the death of his inner life. He admits that he can sense his soul only in terms of "un vide, une attente, une aspiration intérieure."⁴

In La Joie, Chantal de Clergerie, is overwhelmed at the thought of the lamentable anguish that those around her suffer because God has vacated their lives:

Hélas! ils n'avaient que moi, dit-elle. Dieu les oublie! L'idée de cette solitude sans recours, éternelle, à peine eut-elle osé la concevoir, brisa d'un coup toute résistance, l'acheva.⁵

¹ Georges Bernanos, Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, (Paris: Plon, 1938), p. 272.

² Ibid., p. 72.

³ Ibid., p. 71.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1560.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 681.

The numerous portraits of sinners in the Bernanosian universe produce a vast and unforgettable spectacle of modern day man severed from society and God and abandoned to the misery of his "solitude".

In attempting to resolve man's supernatural catastrophe it was but natural that Bernanos should refer to God. As a Roman Catholic, his thoughts are constantly turned towards the Christian goal of "solidarity". This term indicates the reconciliation of a soul with divine hope. It is thus specifically concerned with the co-operation and communion that the author feels convinced will take place between all creatures and their Creator. In Les Grands cimetières sous la lune he draws the attention of his readers to this belief: "Compagnons inconnus, vieux frères, nous arriverons ensemble, un jour, aux portes du royaume de Dieu."¹ Convinced that salvation is within the reach of all, "Le salut est à votre portée,"² he encourages human beings to undertake the adventure of sanctity that is rooted in the Church by adopting "l'esprit d'enfance", one of the principal virtues of his beloved Saint Thérèse de Lisieux:

Le seul parti qui vous reste à prendre
est celui que vous propose la Sainte:
redevenez vous-mêmes des enfants, re-
trouvez l'esprit d'enfance.³

Bernanos could not fail to believe that within "the Church of the Saints" there exists a certain mysterious relationship that

¹
p. III. Georges Bernanos, Les Grands cimetières sous la lune,

²
Ibid., p. 268.

³
Ibid., p. 262.

binds men together in God. He reveals this viewpoint in Les Enfants

Humiliés:

... une certaine solidarité fraternelle
qui nous faisait membres d'un même corps
souffrant, participants aux mérites de
l'église universelle, de l'église universelle
des combattants, vivants et morts.¹

Doubtless he had reflected deeply on the mystery of the Crucifixion and believed that the self-sacrifice of the Cross releases man from the bondage of sin and permits him to share in the interaction of the divine Communion of Saints whereby sinners are reunited with God. Bernanos therefore invites each of his brothers and sisters to follow the divine example and undertake a similar self-sacrificial act of love. He seems to be suggesting that "solitude" is the price humanity must pay to help eradicate original sin. Moreover, by partaking in an earthly life of suffering, man is performing a Christ-like act of devotion. He is in fact sharing in the process of his own redemption.

In reconsidering the author's desire that both Mouchettes be granted a merciful judgement by Heaven, we are obliged to recognize that what might appear to be no more than the concern of a novelist for two of his characters is actually a more general expression of Bernanos' love for his fellows. He is profoundly compassionate towards all his characters, regardless of whether they are sinners or "saints" and he communicates to his reader these

¹ Georges Bernanos, Les Enfants Humiliés, (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 12.

feelings of sympathy and love for each of his suffering creatures. Writing in Barbacena on February 2 in 1941, Bernanos has this to say:

- Que ce monde a besoin de tendresse!
Le jour va venir où il donnera volontiers
toute sa puissance et tout son or pour un peu de
clairvoyance et de douce pitié!¹

This opinion of the writer reminds us that "Dieu est Amour, la Création est un acte d'amour."² We are to realize that because of God's infinite love for His creature, He will always be moved by man's "solitude" and come to his assistance. The author's commendation of his two suffering heroines to the security of divine compassion and mercy is therefore to be seen as encompassing a vision of salvation and solidarity in God which Bernanos sought for mankind in general.

While in the writer's mind, solidarity is associated with the charity of God, "solitude" is strongly identified with the person of Satan. Man's greatest enemy, Bernanos writes in Les Grands cimetières sous la lune:

... n'est pas seulement la force de désordre qu'il porte en lui: instinct, désir, quel que soit le nom qu'on lui donne. Son suborneur est le plus grand des anges tombé de la plus haute cime des Cieux.³

¹ Albert Béguin, Bernanos par lui-même, (Paris: Seuil, 1966), Collection "Ecrivains de Toujours," p. 134.

² Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 276.

³ Georges Bernanos, Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, p. 71.

The Devil indeed occupies a privileged place in Bernanos' fiction. The writer describes the craft and versatility of man's Enemy in his first novel Sous le soleil de Satan:

Il est dans l'oraison du Solitaire, dans son jeûne et sa pénitence, au creux de la plus profonde extase, et dans le silence du coeur... Il empoisonne l'eau lustrale, il brûle dans la cire consacrée, respire dans l'haleine des vierges, déchire avec la haire et la discipline, corrompt toute voie. On l'a vu mentir sur les lèvres entrouvertes pour dispenser la parole de vérité, poursuivre le juste, au milieu du tonnerre et des éclairs du ravissement béatifique, jusque dans les bras même de Dieu...¹

In the tradition of his Christian formation, Bernanos believed that Satan, in his earlier status as the archangel Lucifer, chief of the angels, rebelled through jealousy of God's omnipotence as the Creator and fell as a consequence. Through Satan's seductive power, man's divine state became corrupted and he suffered a similar fall from grace. We are made aware of the intentions of the rebel angel in his dealings with mankind as Bernanos observes: "son génie est de corrompre l'acte dans ses intentions et la vie à sa source même."² The author will explain further that it is Satan who unleashes "les forces obscures qui mettront demain l'univers à feu et à sang."³ Although, as Satan, he may still retain his supernatural powers which he uses solely for the perpetuation of evil, he

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 154.

² Georges Bernanos, Le Crépuscule des Vieux, p. 61.

³ Ibid., p. 61.

nevertheless owes his creation to God and is therefore, like the adversary in the Book of Job, subordinate to Him. His existence then in Bernanos' artistic world, wherein we propose to examine certain aspects of the problem of "solitude" and its solution of solidarity, must be interpreted as a scandalous liberty, a divine permission granted through the perfection of God's love.

It is with this Bernanosian attitude in mind regarding the infinite nature of divine love that we tend to view the author's remark in the last year of his life:

Le scandale de l'univers n'est pas la souffrance, c'est la liberté. Dieu a fait libre sa création, voilà le scandale des scandales, car tous les autres scandales procèdent de lui.¹

Because man's solidarity is found in Christ's Redemption, Bernanos is determined to impress upon his reader the centrality of Christ in his vision. It is evident in his polemical work by the emphasis he places upon the Christian doctrine that man is made in the image and likeness of God.² Further proof of our resemblance with Christ is provided by the divine capacity for love that the polemicist constantly reminds us we possess.³ Yet it is in his fiction that the author makes us most conscious of the presence of Jesus Christ. This is accomplished in each of his works through the suffering of "solitude" to which each of his characters must submit and which so closely parallels Christ's "solitude". It is especially

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 280.

² Georges Bernanos, Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, p. 71.

³ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 287.

evident in the intensity of the anguish which accompanies all those who die. We have only to think of the long drawn out death agony of sinners like M. Ouine and of the excruciating pain that drives so many others to destroy themselves rather than continue to endure their "solitude". Philippe of Un Mauvais Rêve, Evangéline and André Gaspard of Un Crime and both Mouchettes are a few of the examples of suicides.

However, our awareness of Christ is especially reinforced by the Christian example set by the characters whose lives and deaths most closely resemble those of the saints; abbé Donissan from Sous le soleil de Satan, abbé Chevance and Chantal de Clergerie from L'Imposture and La Joie, the curé of Ambricourt from Le Journal d'un curé de campagne and Blanche de la Force from Les Dialogues des Carmélites. The suffering and death of these "saints" are at once an analogy and an evocation of the suffering and death of Christ. More than anything else they bear witness to His presence in the Bernanosian universe.

The central role of Christ is also underscored by the Church. We ought not to overlook the fact that the majority of principal characters are priests. Although only a few of them are "saints", all are representatives of the Church and therefore of Christ in the world. Often, the task of bringing to fruition the adventure of sanctity falls upon the more obscure ministers of the Church. For example, the Saint de Lumbres could never realize his full destiny without the encouragement and support, the sympathy and sense of direction given him by his superior, abbé Menou-Segrais. In exactly the same way, the curé of Ambricourt draws upon the under-

standing and compassion, the solid support and encouragement of his spiritual advisor and friend, the curé of Torcy. Chantal de Clergerie, radiates the simplicity and the charity nurtured in her by her father confessor, abbé Chevance.

If then Bernanos succeeds in using some of the more obscure ministers of the Church to help invest his fictional writing with the divine presence, if he insists on situating the action of each novel in a specific village that always conforms to the boundaries of a parish and thus represents a microcosm of Christianity and hence the Church, it is because of the emphasis that he wishes to place upon the Church as an instrument of divine reconciliation.

Reviewing our study of Bernanosian fiction we cannot fail to notice that for Bernanos, the tragedy of human "solitude" poses a major problem for modern man. Alienated through moral and spiritual degradation, his characters frequently revolt against society and God, often even committing suicide and seeming doomed to damnation.

Further, the writer uses an organized system of images that are grouped around the central ideas of silence and "solitude". By this means, he is able to evoke a very special atmosphere that is peculiar to the blighted Bernanosian universe his characters inhabit.

However, Bernanos repeatedly reconciles his sinners with God by means of the Church, his "saints" and the Communion of Saints. This optimistic vision is used to illustrate the vital message of Christianity. It reassures a despairing civilization and encourages its members to reroute their journey through life to seek out and rediscover God.

In the course of our study and research of the "tragique solitude" that confronts modern day man, it became evident that the theme has not to date received sufficient critical examination. However, numerous scholars of international reputation have repeatedly made reference to "solitude" in their examination of Bernanos' life and work. For example although Albert Béguin, writing in Bernanos par lui-même, limits his examination almost exclusively to the treatment of the theme of "enfance", he inevitably links this central theme with others of which "solitude" is one. Sinners are described as "prisonniers du mensonge et du désespoir,..."¹ Béguin notes as well that the secret of M. Ouine's despair derives from "sa totale vacuité intérieure..."² He describes this work as "ce roman de l'absence de Dieu,..."³ and indicates the significant difference between the death of M. Ouine and that of La Prieure in Les Dialogues des Carmélites:

Chez M. Ouine, le scandale est d'une âme si bien aliénée d'elle-même que ni sa vie ni sa mort ne peuvent plus avoir de sens et que tout est pareillement solitude et vacance. Chez la Prieure, le scandale est celui-là même des souffrances du Christ.⁴

Such examples however, provide us with the only consideration that Albert Béguin gives to the theme of "solitude" in this work.

¹ Albert Béguin, Bernanos par lui-même, p. 6.

² Ibid., p. 47.

³ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

While William Bush concentrates on the presence of suffering in his study of the themes of Souffrance et Expiation dans la pensée de Bernanos, the subject is presented in the perspective of expiation. Unlike Béguin, Dr. Bush is especially struck by the presence of suffering in the fiction of Bernanos. However, his work is chiefly oriented towards analysing the mystery of expiation.

In his essay Georges Bernanos, Louis Chaigne tends to view the drama of "solitude" as being restricted to a particular work, La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette:

Le drame d'une solitude y est enclos et non pas celui d'une solitude banale, à supposer qu'une solitude puisse l'être. Il s'agit de la solitude d'une enfant perdue, que n'aime personne, aux prises, un soir et une nuit, avec l'hostilité déchaînée de la nature, et qui semble abandonnée de Dieu même, comme Jésus le fut sur le Golgotha.¹

In his copious and keenly perceptive notes to the Gallimard Edition of the Oeuvres Romanesques of Georges Bernanos, Michel Estève makes three important evaluations about the subject of "solitude". Viewing the death agonies of both abbé Chevance and the Prioress, he notes that the author obliges all his heroes to live the "solitude" of Christ in the Garden: "Le romancier leur fait vivre le cri de Gethsémani: Mon Dieu, Mon Dieu pourquoi m'as-tu abandonné?"² The critic reinforces our awareness of this fact by reference to the "saints": "Dans sa quête de la sainteté, le héros

¹
Louis Chaigne, Georges Bernanos, (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1960), "Classiques du XXe Siècle", p. 46.

²
Michel Estève, "Notes", Oeuvres Romanesques, p. 1770.

de Bernanos est seul comme le Christ au Jardin des Oliviers."¹ However, it is in his comparison of Un Mauvais Rêve with Un Crime that Michel Estève notes the great emphasis placed upon the theme of "solitude":

L'optique est néanmoins profondément modifiée dans Un Mauvais Rêve. Il ne s'agit plus d'un drame policier, où le meurtre est au centre de l'intrigue, mais d'un drame de la solitude et de la privation de Dieu, mais de l'aventure pathétique d'êtres rongés par l'ennui et privés d'espoir.²

In another of his works, Le Sens de l'amour dans les romans de Bernanos, the same critic observes:

Illusion de l'amour, la luxure enferme les âmes dans la prison de l'égoïsme. "Solitude et silence, silence et solitude, je ne serai jamais sortie de ce cercle enchanté." ... Tous les "médiocres" pourraient exprimer cette constatation désespérée de l'héroïne d'Un Mauvais Rêve; avec la honte, la solitude est bien leur seul partage. Rupture avec l'amour divin, au sens théologique du terme, le péché augmente l'intensité de l'ennui.³

In an introduction to Bernanos for English readers, Peter Hebblethwaite recognizes the wretchedness of Bernanos' victims: "But "misère" can also be viewed in religious terms as a minus sign indicating God's absence,"...⁴ His comment about M. Ouine seems to

¹
Ibid., p. 1776.

²
Ibid., p. 1803.

³
Michel Estève, Le Sens de l'amour dans les romans de Bernanos, (Paris: Minard, 1959), Lettres Modernes, Collection "Thèmes et Mythes", p. 25.

⁴
Peter Hebblethwaite, Bernanos (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1965), "Studies in Modern European Literature and Thought", p. 36.

be in accord with the opinion of other critics: "The solitude of sin and death are verified in Ouine. He has led a life of passive receptivity, of 'disponibilité'.¹"

Other writers who note the importance of the theme of "solitude" are Max Milner in Georges Bernanos, Urs Von Balthasar in Le Chrétien Bernanos, Luc Estang in Présence de Bernanos, Guy Gaucher in Le thème de la mort dans les romans de Bernanos, Jean de Fabrègues in Bernanos tel qu'il était and Jessie Lynn Gillespie in Le tragique dans l'oeuvre de Georges Bernanos. Except for this last mentioned critic, none of these has devoted more than a few lines to record his awareness of the theme of "solitude" and of its affinities with other themes, its effect on particular characters. Jessie Lynn Gillespie alone regards the problem of human "solitude" as of sufficient importance to warrant serious consideration. Yet even in this instance, the treatment is limited in scope to less than nine pages which deal with "solitude" in the perspective of the human condition.² The critic touches on Poverty, on the anguish of man faced with the absence of God and on the despair and self-hatred that arise out of this condition. Although interesting and sound, the evaluation is hardly exhaustive.

This study has been undertaken in an attempt to bring more sharply into critical focus the neglected tragedy of "solitude"

¹
Ibid., p. 56.

²
Jessie Lynn Gillespie, Le tragique dans l'oeuvre de Georges Bernanos, (Paris: Minard, 1960), pp. 63-72.

and its solution of human solidarity in co-operation with God that appear so vital to Bernanos as both man and writer.

In Chapter I, I propose to examine the images through which Bernanos creates an atmosphere of "solitude" that permeates his fiction and adds tremendous realism and force to his message.

In Chapters II, III and IV, I intend to present a systematic study of mankind's alienation as portrayed in each of the three categories of sinners: (1. Mediocrity and "les imbéciles" 2. "Les enfants humiliés" 3. The egomaniacs).

In Chapter V, I shall show the preoccupation of the writer with projecting his aim of reunion and communion in God for all human beings. This goal is translated in his portrait of the Church. In Chapter VI, I shall then present Bernanos' view of sanctity as another of the principal means of conducting humanity back to the Creator. Finally, I shall illustrate in Chapter VII, the manner in which the themes of alienation and reconciliation are combined and integrated with each other to project the author's aim of Christian solidarity in God through the Communion of Saints. My Conclusion will terminate the dissertation.

CHAPTER I

The imagery of "solitude"

It is essential to remember the fact that Georges Bernanos is a Christian writer whose life and work are shaped by the depth of his religious fervour. Since he was convinced that the tragedy of modern man arises from his spiritual devitalization, the writer was determined to focus special attention on those very spiritual values which the modern world either ignored or rejected. So that we may feel and, hopefully, understand what he passionately believes, Bernanos makes a direct appeal to our imagination. One of his most important devices for creating this appeal is surely his widespread use of imagery: "Je voudrais dans mes livres lancer¹ des escadrons d'images!", he said in 1919 to a close friend who described Bernanos as a great literary painter because of the profusion of images in his work. Growing out of his conviction that Satan pollutes the soul of man thereby inducing him to turn away from the Creator, Bernanos frequently makes use of a system of images and terms which serve to evoke the very presence of Satan. By fusing these images into the décor and setting of his novels, by using them to reinforce the power of direct statement, the author succeeds in

¹ "Souvenirs d'un ami." Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Georges Bernanos, No. 1, décembre 1949, p. 11.

conjuring up for the reader those infernal forces that are at the source of the human condition of "solitude".

Let us begin our study by examining those images that deal with geographical isolation. In the early short story Dialogue d'Ombres, the young Françoise complains to her lover Jacques about the isolation by which she is imprisoned: "j'ai vécu dans ce village perdu d'un pays qui n'est pas le mien, quinze ans, quinze ans! Quinze ans seule, ou presque..."¹ Although directly stated, the idea of "solitude" is reinforced by reference to the remoteness of the "village perdu." This idea is further heightened by the triple emphasis that is placed upon the length of time spent in such seclusion. However, the intensity of the young girl's sense of alienation is perhaps best communicated by the nature of the experience that the setting in which she lives inspires in her. She feels like an orphan, an alien, shut away in a chateau, "perdu dans la campagne".² Further, the image of the chateau seems to suggest some sort of impregnable fortress in which Françoise has been confined and thus insulated against the operation of God's grace. As one of Bernanos' lost souls, she is impervious to the radiance of Christian faith. In short, the physical or geographical isolation in the settings is symbolic of the spiritual alienation of the characters. The accuracy of this observation would seem to be borne out by Françoise's admission that she is devoid of religious faith.³

¹ Georges Bernanos, Dialogue d'Ombres, p. 44.

² Ibid., p. 47.

³ Ibid., p. 44.

This overall impression of physical isolation is not confined to the early short stories. In the first two sections of Sous le Soleil de Satan, the action occurs in the small secluded village of Campagne. Later, in the third section, abbé Donissan is sent to another tiny parish in the hamlet of Lumbres that is even more remote, being significantly described as "ce lieu désert"¹. In Un Crime, the parish of Mègère, where the drama unfolds is likewise lost, cut off from towns and even from roads.² Bernanos will lay particular stress on the extreme "solitude" of this tiny, half-dead village.³ In Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, the young priest testifies to the isolated nature of his parish on the very first page of the novel,⁴ while the curé de Fenouille, in Monsieur Ouine, expresses similar fears about his own parish and describes it as a hamlet that is lost in the woods and set apart from all other communities.⁵ In La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette the seclusion of the village where the central character lives, and the abandoned quarry where she chooses to die, are both particularly apt choices. In one, as in the other, the "solitude" is complete.

Like village, hamlet and parish, numerous Bernanosian dwellings are lost, secluded, remote or inaccessible. The chateau of Françoise in Dialogue d'Ombres offers one example.⁶ Similarly, in

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 232.

² Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 729.

³ Ibid., p. 733.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1031.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1467.

⁶ Georges Bernanos, Dialogue d'Ombres, p. 47.

Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, the chateau that the Count and Countess occupy stands apart from all else and is portrayed in terms of a human being who has alienated himself by deliberately shunning both villagers and priest.¹ In Monsieur Ouine the dilapidated chateau of Wambescourt where the principal character lives is equally remote. Its chatelain remarks: "... nous vivons seuls, absolument seuls..."² In Un Mauvais Rêve M. de Clergerie lives in similar rural seclusion³ and the site of the presbytery in Un Crime is equally inaccessible.⁴ The cabin of the second Mouchette, the forest huts that Arsène frequents and the secret hut in which Hélène and Eugène take their lives together in Monsieur Ouine⁵ are all hidden away and isolated. Indeed, there is a tendency for village, parish, hamlet and house to be presented in terms of a lost wayfarer who stands in seclusion and is thus separated in many respects from the rest of the world. Such images are charged with vital significance for the author since they communicate a view of humanity that is completely at variance with the ultimate goal of human solidarity that Bernanos envisages as a devout Christian.

It is common knowledge that the Hindu, the monk and the nun specifically seek out a setting of isolation. They rid them-

¹
p. 1142. Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne,

²
Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1359.

³
Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 635.

⁴
Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 727.

⁵
p. 1269. Georges Bernanos, La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette,

⁶
Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1474.

selves of worldly distractions the more speedily to realize God. The concept of geographical isolation then is not necessarily an impediment to communion with God. However, those Bernanosian characters confined by "solitude" bear no resemblance to contemplatives. The isolation associated with them is used to illustrate their state of primitivism, of degeneracy from a religious point of view. They are alienated because their lifestyle reveals a wholesale rejection of Christian values. In Bernanosian literature then, mankind does not appear as a unified mass of souls bound together in God through Christian faith. With the use of his imagery, the writer spends considerable time and effort to portray humanity as a series of diversified and discordant groups of men. Each has wandered from the road leading to God, is lost and hence cut off from the source of life. Surely this is one of the reasons why the author qualifies his images with an accumulation of adjectives that are specifically designed to spotlight a single idea. It is not by chance that so many of these groups are described as lost, hidden away, cut off, remote, inaccessible, isolated, or abandoned. Representing a microcosm of humanity, each such image reflects the fallen condition of twentieth century man abandoned to the tragic experience of his spiritual exile.

In Bernanos' more mature novels the significance of "solitude" is made to pervade the whole fabric of the world in which his characters live and in a sense tends to dominate their lives. The young priest in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne spends considerable time emphasizing the presence of evil in his parish. After

¹
Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, pp. 1031-1032.

analyzing the atmosphere of moral and spiritual corruption which it has bred there, he expresses the sensation of "solitude" that overwhelms both his parishioners and himself.¹ Bernanos succeeds in communicating the vision of unregenerate, fallen, modern-day man by means of a series of striking images. The parish first appears in the image of a creature that is afflicted by a malignant spiritual disease.² Next, it takes on the appearance of a wretched, exhausted beast,³ whose significance will be treated later on. Finally, the condition of man is traced to the image of Christianity in a state of decomposition.⁴ In Monsieur Ouine, the same insidious force of "solitude" appears to have destroyed the spiritual links between the villagers of Fenouille and their Creator. The state of their spiritual hostility is vividly captured in the author's imagery for he envisages the inhabitants of Fenouille as forming "la paroisse morte", an early title for that novel.

According to Bernanos, the characters of Un Mauvais Rêve reenact a similar drama of "solitude": "Ce sont des êtres qui ont perdu leurs raisons de vivre, et qui s'agitent désespérément dans le vide de leurs pauvres âmes avant de crever."⁵ The empty, wretched and meaningless existence shared by all these lost souls is well reflected in the nightmare image that the author uses as the title of his novel. It is perhaps revealing that he also thought of

¹
Ibid., p. 1031.

²
Ibid., p. 1031.

³
Ibid., p. 1031.

⁴
Ibid., p. 1032.

⁵
Michel Estève, "Notes", Oeuvres Romanesques, p. 1803.

calling it "Au bout du rouleau",¹ and that Michel Estève describes it as² 25
"(d') un drame de la solitude et de la privation de Dieu,"...

At times Bernanos will evoke the diabolical influence by specifically creating a definite image of "solitude" at the very outset of a novel. He will then introduce a character and thereby indicate his state of alienation. It is a device used to set more than one novel in motion:

Voici l'heure du soir qu'aima P.-J.
Toulet. Voici l'horizon qui se défait--un
grand nuage d'ivoire au couchant et, du
zénith au sol, le ciel crépusculaire, la
solitude immense, déjà glacée--plein d'un
silence liquide...³

Here the writer presents the opening scene of his first novel Sous le Soleil de Satan, in which a number of elements are skillfully interwoven to create an image of "la solitude immense" that threatens to engulf everything. In so doing he establishes a setting of melancholy foreboding which hangs like a pall over the whole sequence of events in the story. More important still, however, is the fact that Germaine Malorthy, the principal character of this first section, is thereby linked to her melancholy destiny by the very setting in which she appears.

Normally, an image is a term or group of words used to imitate or represent the external form of an object or to denote its peculiar character, its essence. Bernanos sometimes uses a specific term that is not an image in the strictest sense of the above definition. However, the figure of speech serves to convey a similar idea. For example, silence is not an image. It is used by Bernanos to form a link with the realm of "solitude". In fact, silence is seldom used in its original sense alone.

¹
Ibid., 1803.

²
Ibid., 1803.

³
Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 59.

It becomes in the fiction of Bernanos another of the attributes of Satan for we are reminded in Sous le soleil de Satan that "son chef-d'oeuvre est une paix muette, solitaire".¹ Silence then conveys a distinctly infernal quality that frequently testifies to the proximity of Satan even though he may be invisible. In his first novel the writer emphasizes this aspect of silence when abbé Don⁴is⁴an is made to experience the presence of Satan even before his meeting with the enemy on the way to Etaples. He becomes suddenly aware of "le profond, l'épais silence ... l'extraordinaire silence"²... In L'Imposture after one of the attempts of abbé Cénabre at suicide, the author compares his wretched state of "solitude" to "l'enfer, dans son silence absolu."³ In La Joie, Bernanos explains the significance of silence in its association with the isolation of the damned:

Si l'enfer ne répond rien au damné, ce n'est pas qu'il refuse de répondre, car plus stricte, hélas! est l'observance du feu impérissable: c'est qu'en vérité l'enfer n'a rien à dire et ne dira jamais rien, éternellement.⁴

The fact is that silence helps to indicate a dead relationship between men as well as the fractured link between creature and Creator. It also suggests the blighting influence of Satan upon mankind. Moreover, when silence is used in conjunction with "solitude", these ideas solidly reinforce each other since both are imbued with supernatural qualities. Hence Simone Alfieri in Un Mauvais Rêve will describe her lamentable alienation in the image of an enchanted circle from which there is no escape:

¹
Ibid., p. 213.

²
Ibid., p. 163.

³
Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 376.

⁴
Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 561.

"Solitude et silence, silence et solitude, je ne serai jamais sortie de ce cercle enchanté..."¹ Mouchette of La Nouvelle Histoire is assaulted by the anguish of "solitude" with the brutality of an epileptic fit. As with Simone, she is imprisoned in "un cercle invisible de silence et de solitude..."² While the curé of Ambricourt keeps watch over his parishioners in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, he is overwhelmed by the same trial of anguish: "Il est une heure: la dernière lampe du village vient de s'éteindre. Vent et pluie. Même solitude, même silence."³ Silence and "solitude" are thus used by Bernanos to focus the reader's attention upon the supernatural forces that are at work in his universe. In this instance, we are allowed to see the overwhelming power of evil that pervades the physical world and the disastrous effects that man's abandonment of Christianity has produced. The writer will employ other images with a similar intention.

While images of light and darkness appear in the work of Bernanos with their traditional Biblical significance of good and evil, there are other occasions when the image of light can have a totally different meaning. Witness for example the title of the novel Sous le Soleil de Satan. The devil, as the curé of Ambricourt informs

¹ Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 919.

² Georges Bernanos, La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, pp. 1342-1343.

³ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1113.

us in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, often attempts to parody his Creator and undo the work of the Creation.¹ We are also aware that he is the father of lies,² and in Sous le soleil de Satan Bernanos refers to him as "L'étoile reniée du matin: Lucifer, ou la fausse Aurore..."³ It is thus in the guise of false prophet reflected in the full glare of his imposture, that we should understand, on one level at least, the ironic image of satanic light inherent in the title of the writer's first novel. Similar images of brilliant illumination with overtones of intense heat accompany many events in La Joie. In this novel, Monsieur de Clergerie is filled with apprehension whenever he wonders whether he will be able to wait for "la fin de cet abominable été?"⁴ As Chantal his daughter inhales the overheated air, she cannot withhold the significant exclamation: "Quel été, dit-elle, n'est-ce pas? On finit par regarder la lumière avec rancune, comme une ennemie."⁵ It becomes clear that such images of light do indicate a hostile presence and should be regarded as malevolent.

This is even more forcibly brought out in the opening pages of Monsieur Ouine, where images of light and heat again appear to be dominant. If they are meant to indicate the rising tide of sexual awareness and desire in the adolescent Steeny, they nonetheless represent, at the same time, the false light that is cast by "le soleil de Satan". Light and darkness then do not only depict the ever

¹
Ibid., p. 1087.

²
Georges Bernanos, Les Enfants Humiliés, p. 120.

³
Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 235.

⁴
Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 706.

⁵
Ibid., p. 704.

continuing struggle between the forces of good and evil. They sometimes reflect the battle between the false light and the true. Intense heat and brilliant light images also provide two of the optimum conditions required for the germination and the proliferation of evil.

But if the person of the enemy is sometimes associated with light, his presence is even more frequently characterized by the element of darkness, as can be seen in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne:¹ "la nuit appartient au diable." During his personal struggle with the enemy in Sous le soleil de Satan, abbé Donissan feels for the second time "la nuit s'était faite autour de lui, en lui."² As he is engulfed from within and without by this more than physical element, he becomes conscious of its supernatural character as it seems to invade and permeate his soul. We ought to remember that the two novels L'Imposture and La Joie were originally intended to be incorporated into a single work and visualized in the significant image of Les Ténèbres.³

When the gloom descends upon the village of Ambricourt in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, it translates the forces of isolation which weigh upon the young priest and his parish and rob him of the capacity to assist his parishioners in their spiritual distress.⁴ Later, when it is past midnight, the priest, still keeping

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1039.

² Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 184.

³ Michel Estève, "Notes", Oeuvres Romanesques, p. 1765.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1031.

his vigil, will feel further overwhelmed by his isolation. It is the singular evocation of night which will translate most clearly the terrifying presence of the enemy.

Dieu! je respire, j'aspire la nuit, la nuit entre en moi par je ne sais quelle inconcevable, quelle inimaginable brèche de l'âme. Je suis moi-même nuit.¹

Monsieur Ouine, the supremely diabolical character of Bernanos, fears the bright, cool dawn which seems to herald a new spring of hope and a resurgence of life.² We note however that he feels safe and secure in the dark.

Georges Bernanos often employs the image of night to evoke the awful presence of the rebel angel and to demonstrate his overwhelming obsession to captivate and destroy the soul of man. Such images also serve to reflect a world shrouded in mystery where man is doomed to struggle blindly in his search for the light of divine comprehension.

As with the image of darkness, the atmospheric conditions of wind and rain occur frequently in the novels to help charge the decor with the special ambiance of "solitude". In Dialogue d'Ombres, Françoise delves into her tortured past to describe for her lover the source of that sense of isolation which overwhelms her. We learn that as a small child of four she had been alienated from everything that held any meaning for her, from everyone that she loved.³ As

¹
Ibid., p. 1113.

²
Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1470.

³
Georges Bernanos, Dialogue d'Ombres, pp. 46-47.

she lays bare her soul, the author makes repeated references to images of wind and rain which assault and often inundate the world in which the characters live, threaten to engulf them and serve to reveal their spiritual desolation. Françoise recalls, for example, that her inner catastrophe began in weather conditions which date back to "un soir de pluie et de boue, et de grand vent d'ouest..."¹ In the writer's very personal Christian perspective, it becomes significant that because of the incessant rains, "La Rance déborde depuis Vernueil, le chemin est sous un pied d'eau,"...² Like Françoise, we cannot ignore "l'horizon trempé de pluie."³ Further, as she unburdens herself of her grief, the author adds a revealing notation: "Une bouffée de vent, à travers le taillis encore grêle d'avril, lui jetait l'averse au visage"...⁴ While she groans like a wounded animal in response to Jacques, there is another significant addition:

La pluie ruisselait toujours autour d'eux,
sans percer tout à fait la noire frondaison
des pins. L'air était plein du sifflement
modulé de la bourrasque...⁵

In this early short story the still immature writer can be seen struggling to integrate physical setting with character portrayal. Later, when he becomes more a master of his craft, there will be greater concision; a tighter harmony will be established between décor and characterization. For example, in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, the curé of Ambricourt will write in his diary:

¹
Ibid., p. 46.

²
Ibid., p. 41.

³
Ibid., p. 41.

⁴
Ibid., p. 42.

⁵
Ibid., p. 43.

Il est une heure: la dernière lampe du village vient de s'éteindre. Vent et pluie. Même solitude, même silence.¹

In a few short lines the novelist will evoke the terrifying and desolate landscape of the priest's soul, and the hostility of the village around him through a blend of silence, darkness, wind and rain.

Indeed, rain in the fiction of Bernanos takes on a special significance. As Gerda Blumenthal points out, it can be either "the 'azure spring' of the saving water of grace,"... or "the satanic water of death in the form of an all-engulfing flood of savage, primordial power."² The inner assault of Satan on Cénabre in L'Imposture is described by an image of water:

... par un suprême effort, les arguments familiers surgissent de toutes parts, dans un désordre affreux. Mais il sent trop, il sent avec terreur que cette confusion n'est qu'un remous, à la surface d'une eau profonde.³

Later we are left in no doubt that it is the satanic flood which poisoned him.⁴ Just prior to the appearance of Arsène, who will ravish the lost Mouchette, in La Nouvelle Histoire, the forest becomes transformed into a world of swirling wind and rain:

Le vent semble venir de tous les points à la fois, et il se creuse ça et là, au plus épais du taillis cinglé par la monstreuse averse, de véritables tourbillons où, parmi les branches rebroussées, une mince colonne de feuilles mortes monte vers le ciel, aussitôt rabattues par les trombes d'eau.⁵

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1113.

² Gerda Blumenthal, The Poetic Imagination of Georges Bernanos, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p. xiii.

³ Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 333.

⁴ Ibid., p. 335.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, p. 1272.

As Mouchette follows Arsène to his hut, we learn that the wind has redoubled its fury¹ and the waters are rising.² Both wind and water combine to mount a violent attack upon the central character and the assault is depicted in an accumulation of images. "La monstrueuse averse" multiplies and expands in vigour to become "de véritables tourbillons", an image in which both wind and water are fused into a single element that increases still more in volume and power as it is finally transformed into "les trombes d'eau". The use of such imagery is one of the means employed to forecast the tragic "solitude" that will overtake and engulf Mouchette.

In Monsieur Ouine, even more than anywhere else in the author's work, still greater emphasis is placed upon the infernal action of rain. The ground is frequently drenched by torrential downpours and appears to be ever sodden. While one assault on the earth is in progress, a second attack is already being prepared.³ The murder of the little cowherd takes place on a night that is teeming with rain and his body is recovered from a pond in which the boiling torrent foams like beer.⁴ While the body lies on the table in the mayor's home, awaiting the arrival of Dr. Malépine, a significant notation is added: "Au-dehors, l'immense pulsation de l'averse couvre tout."⁵

These water images of the novelist derive from a single source, rain that is constantly portrayed with images of turbulent

¹
Ibid., p. 1274.

²
Ibid., p. 1273.

³
Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1375.

⁴
Ibid., p. 1393.

⁵
Ibid., p. 1397.

winds. The two elements are often fused together and unleashed in a series of violent onslaughts that, like the Deluge, threaten to engulf man and his world. However, they also appear to symbolize the infernal tempestuous passions, the furies of the flesh that constantly explode to overwhelm the feeble creature and sweep him headlong into the abyss. The images of wind and rain thus represent those hostile forces of nature that, in the Bernanosian universe, are ever ready to ravage and destroy the soul of man.

But while rain and wind help to evoke the "solitude" that is associated with the rebel angel, another of Satan's attributes is coldness. The curé of Fenouille in Monsieur Ouine, while preaching to his parishioners, states:

Vous vous sentez tout transis, tous froids.
On parle toujours du feu de l'enfer, mais
personne ne l'a vu, mes amis. L'enfer,
c'est le froid.¹

In Sous le Soleil de Satan, the future Saint de Lumbres will hear from the lips of Satan the following words: "Je suis le froid lui-même. L'essence de ma lumière est un froid intolérable..."² Later the same priest will conjure up the isolated members of humanity who inhabit

...d'autres villages et d'autres bourgs,
tous pareils, crevant d'abondance,
ennemis des pauvres, pleins d'avares³
accroupis, froids comme des suaires...

¹
Ibid., p. 1490.

²
Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 175.

³
Ibid., p. 233.

In La Joie, Chantal compares the sadness which weighs so heavily upon her soul with the coldness of hell. "Oh! papa, moi aussi, je puis donc être triste ... triste, de cette tristesse aussi froide que l'enfer!"¹

In Monsieur Ouine, conversing with Steeny, Jambe-de-Laine refers to satanic hatred in terms of water that is clear but icy.² She will also explain to him that the comfort and reassurance which Monsieur Ouine inspires in his followers derive from a kind of frigid spiritual tranquillity that he exudes:

... comme d'autres rayonnent, échauffent,
notre ami absorbe tout rayonnement, toute
chaleur. Le génie de M. Ouine, voyez-vous,
c'est le froid. Dans ce froid, l'âme
repose.³

In considering the significance of coldness in Bernanosian fiction it is important to bear in mind the very personal Christian vision of the writer. We must remember that for Bernanos, God is Love,⁴ and hell, as he reveals in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne,⁵ the inability to love. When therefore the writer indicates that coldness is one of the principal qualities associated with Satan and hell, we immediately recognize the coherence of his Christian vision. The satanic cold that envelops his landscapes indicates those obscure regions of his spiritual universe from which the life-giving warmth of divine love has been withheld. Used in association with character, the image of cold denotes the spiritual sterility,

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 594.

² Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1423.

³ Ibid., p. 1423.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 276.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1157.

the death of the soul that results from man's rejection of his divine heritage, his failure to develop the God-given capacity for love.

However, in order to create the imagery of isolation, Bernanos does not limit himself to using image affinities that are concerned solely with geographical settings on the one hand or with atmospheric conditions on the other. In fact, he frequently employs categories of images that are totally dissimilar in character for the purpose of achieving similar results. One group, dealing with animals, is particularly prevalent in his work and extends the range of his treatment of "l'esprit du Mal". Indeed, the author uses animal images so frequently that Albert Béguin undertook the task of compiling notes on what he termed the "bestiaire" of Bernanos.¹ By turning to La Liberté pour quoi faire? we may perhaps better understand the symbolic application of this type of imagery. In this work the writer traces the agony of modern man to the fact that he has adopted the technological outlook. The tragic error and the ill-effects which derive from this outlook are emphatically stated:

L'humanité a été victime ... de toutes
les ressources de la technique et dont
elle peut sortir mutilée à jamais.²

It is a theme to which Bernanos returns constantly, for he recognizes that in Europe, man has embarked upon the machine age. He has mistakenly placed more faith in materialism and in technological progress than in the Christian ideal. By pointing out this mistake

¹
Albert Béguin, "Notes pour un bestiaire", Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Georges Bernanos, (juillet 1958), no. 31, pp. 123-125.

²
Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 153.

he no doubt hopes to avert the impending crisis:

... l'homme d'Europe n'est pas l'homme
matérialiste, c'est un homme déspiritualisé,
un chrétien désaffecté. Ses crimes sont
précisément ceux d'une spiritualité
pervertie.¹

But how is an erroneous belief in material progress related to the fallen condition of man? In answering this question, Bernanos would perhaps remind us that man is made in the image and likeness of God.² According to the writer, "Dieu est l'Amour absolu. L'Amour absolu!"³ For him then, man possesses the spark of divine love. This quality does not merely suggest that he is a creature of God, it signifies that his true destiny can only be fully realized by developing his capacity for absolute love. Such an undertaking is only possible for man if he lives in constant communion with the source of love, God. By worshipping the God of progress then, man has neglected his spiritual essence which as a result has evaporated. The despiritualization which follows is visualized by the novelist in terms of bestiality and prompts him to pose the rhetorical questions:

Si l'homme ne pouvait se réaliser qu'en
Dieu? Si l'opération délicate de l'amputer
de sa part divine--ou du moins d'atrophier
systématiquement cette part jusqu'à ce
qu'elle tombe desséchée comme un organe où
le sang ne circule plus--aboutissait à
faire de lui une bête féroce? Ou pis peut-
être, une bête à jamais domestiquée, un
animal domestique?⁴

¹
Ibid., p. 175.

²
Ibid., p. 287.

³
Georges Bernanos, Le Crépuscule des Vieux, p. 17.

⁴
Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 154.

Animal imagery then is indicative of amputation from God and its corollary, a sinful nature. This viewpoint is given further weight by the novelist as he explains the aim of Satan with regard to the human race.

L'expérience démontrerait plutôt qu'il juge moins facile de nous perdre par l'Esprit de Révolte que de nous avilir par l'Esprit de Servitude, et que, loin de se proposer de nous élever à la dignité satanique d'Ange Rebelles, sa haine clairvoyante médite de nous faire descendre à la condition des bêtes.¹

These convictions of the writer permit us to understand why the majority of his sinners are portrayed as degraded and despiritualized beings who have sunk to the level of animals. Moreover, Bernanos bridges the gap between his animal comparisons and the state of "solitude" they represent when he observes: "Désormais, la solitude appartient aux monstres".² In analysing the animal comparisons which tend to characterize the sinners of Bernanos, we note that they may be divided into two distinct categories. While many images are concerned with beasts that are wild, numerous others deal with domesticated animals. In the group of images using wild beasts, "le mal" is conceived of as an overwhelming and voracious power, suggesting the insatiable appetite that Satan, the "bête ravisseuse",³ develops for the souls of mankind. In keeping with this view, the passions, which frequently goad the individual into sin, are portrayed as un-

¹ Georges Bernanos, Lettres aux Anglais, p. 197.

² Georges Bernanos, Le Crépuscule des vieux, p. 46.

³ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1141.

controllable predators to emphasize their infernal origin and to illustrate the degradation of man's fall. In Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, the curé of Torcy confesses his having yielded to Satan's temptation by suicide as a younger man. He presents just such an image of the seven deadly sins:

A ce moment de ma vie, moi qui te parle,
j'ai cru qu'elle (la pitié) allait me
dévorer. L'orgueil, l'envie, la colère,
la luxure même, les sept péchés capitaux
faisaient chorus, hurlaient de douleur.
Tu aurais dit une troupe de loups arrosés
de pétrole et qui flambent.¹

Later on, the central character will use an animal image to depict the satanic influence which has pervaded and vilified the nature of Chantal, the rebellious daughter of the Count and Countess:

Hélas! il y a dans toutes les maisons,
même chrétiennes, des bêtes invisibles,
des démons. La plus féroce était dans
votre coeur, depuis longtemps, et vous
ne le saviez pas.²

In this novel, the Countess, Chantal, Séraphita, and the wicked village urchins³ are beasts of prey. In Monsieur Ouine, Miss⁴ Jambe-de-Laine⁵ and the crowd⁶ appear in the form of predatory creatures.⁷ Other such images abound in this work and give ample proof of char-

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1076.

² Ibid., p. 1136.

³ Ibid., p. 1160.

⁴ Ibid., p. 1149.

⁵ Ibid., p. 1207.

⁶ Ibid., p. 1207.

⁷ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1443.

⁸ Ibid., p. 1412; p. 1416.

⁹ Ibid., p. 1487.

acters who possess a repugnant, evil personality. Moreover, they almost always display the vicious attitudes and actions that one associates with wild beasts. Indeed, each confrontation appears to be an attempt to claw, maim and mutilate those with whom they come into contact.

But if evil is portrayed in the guise of wild beasts, it is also revealed in images of domesticated creatures. In Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, the curé of Torcy offers such a vision of his parishioners:

J'ai un troupeau, un vrai troupeau,
... Du bétail, ni trop bon ni trop
mauvais, des boeufs, des ânes, des
animaux de trait et de labour.¹

This evocation tends to correspond with that of the dead parish of Fenouille in Monsieur Ouine where the parishioners are compared to a herd of cattle.²

Individuals too are presented by means of similar images, often with the additional quality of resignation. Mlle. Louise in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne³ and the second Mouchette⁴ both express this quality and there are numerous other examples. These images of domesticated animals symbolize the spiritual sloth and passivity that afflict so many of Satan's victims.

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1043.

² Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1483.

³ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1204.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, p. 1271.

Still other images focus attention upon comparisons with beasts that are wounded, hunted, trapped and frequently exhausted. In Dialogue d'Ombres, Françoise groans like "une bête blessée"¹ and the dying Alahowigh behaves like "un animal pris au fer"². Mouchette resembles a hunted creature, about to die, exhausted,³ and Arsène's eyes smoulder like those of an animal pursued.⁴ André Gaspard of Un Crime⁵ and Jambe-de-Laine of Monsieur Ouine either act or look like the hunted quarry.⁶ Other such examples are numerous. The images depicting creatures that are imprisoned by fire, trap, wound or exhaustion tend to symbolize the spiritual atrophy that has immobilized the souls of sinners. By means of such images, the author succeeds in suggesting the rooted state of his characters' hostility. At the same time he is able to communicate their desperate yearning to be liberated from the bondage of their imposture, their refusal to love.

The ironic truth seems to be that their revolt against Heaven masks a longing to resume contact with the realm of grace, for without God, none can live at peace with himself or with others.

¹ Georges Bernanos, Dialogue d'Ombres, p. 43.

² Georges Bernanos, Une Nuit, p. 37.

³ Georges Bernanos, La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, p. 1321.

⁴ Ibid., p. 1293.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 858.

⁶ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1357.

The accumulated pictures of animal ferocity and bestial resignation also help to create and augment the sensation of horror that derives from the vastness of the spectacle of evil. Its power appears to be so unlimited and universal that the creature is threatened with extinction.

The last category of images with which we shall concern ourselves in the study of "solitude" are those dealing with disease, decay and impurity. Let us first consider the author's feelings about disease.

In a letter written in 1926, the author, even in an intimate context, uses this imagery:

Dieu m'éprouve de nouveau. Mon pauvre vieux papa est atteint d'une de ces ignobles tumeurs qui m'ont toujours paru, plus qu'aucun autre mal, la figuration de Satan, le symbole de sa monstrueuse fécondité dans les âmes. Il a un cancer au foie...¹

It is not surprising then that such images linking evil with disease should appear throughout Bernanos' fiction. The rambling chatter of the dying heroine in Madame Dargent is described as "les folles imaginations d'une maniaque agonisante..."² In Une Nuit, Alahowigh, who is dying from poison, makes reference to his "deux mains pourries,..."³ Carlos later describes "le ventre et la poitrine du malheureux marqués de larges taches d'un rouge sombre....aussi le visage défiguré par une horrible enflure,..."⁴

¹ Albert Béguin, Bernanos par lui-même, p. 112.

² Georges Bernanos, Madame Dargent, p. 10.

³ Georges Bernanos, Une Nuit, p. 24.

⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

In the eight novels, many of the principal figures are afflicted with severe illness of one kind or another and often die as a consequence. The first Mouchette in Sous le soleil de Satan experiences a mental crisis and must spend a month convalescing in a sanatorium.¹ In the same novel, Donissan suffers from angina pectoris² and dies from a heart attack.³ Abbé Chevance in L'Imposture suffers and dies of uremia,⁴ while abbé Cénabre undergoes a severe mental crisis.⁵ He will lose his reason and later die insane.⁶ In La Joie⁷ M. de Clergerie is harried by a nervous complaint. A cancer of the stomach will cause the suffering and death of the curé of Ambricourt in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, and the curé of Torcy is also ailing.⁹ The work of a priest, in this novel, is seen as that of a physician working on an infected wound:

Un prêtre est comme un médecin, il ne
doit pas avoir peur des plaies, du pus,
de la sanie. Toutes les plaies de l'âme
se purgent, ...¹⁰

Indeed, the incidence of disease is widespread throughout all of Bernanos' fiction and this is particularly true of his most mature work.

Associated with images of disease are others concerned with fermentation, decay, corruption, mud, excrement and filth. The

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 115.

² Ibid., p. 276.

³ Ibid., p. 306.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 525.

⁵ Ibid., p. 341.

⁶ Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 724.

⁷ Ibid., p. 630.

⁸ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1240.

⁹ Ibid., p. 1130.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 1148.

curé of Torcy in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne uses such images to describe the world: "Or, notre pauvre monde ressemble au vieux père Job sur son fumier, plein de plaies et d'ulcères."¹ And Monsieur Ouine,² described by its author as a "lugubre urinoir", abounds with similar examples. The image of his disintegrating parish fills the curé of Fenouille with horror and loathing at the aspect of its decomposition, its mountains of filth and its lakes of mud.³ Black water collects beneath the château de Néréis, and the building decays from roof to foundation.⁴ The corruption of the châtelain, Anthelme, appears to stem from the same contaminated source⁵ for he too is presented in a state of fermentation and decay. Seeing himself as a fluid, jelly-like creature who inhabits the nether regions of the ocean,⁶ the diseased and dissolute M. Ouine becomes an extension of this corruption.

The sensations of horror and loathing produced by animal imagery are further increased by the constantly recurring images of disease and decay. Both combine to reflect a spectacle of the wanton suffering to which the human race is subjected as a result of the decadent state of Christianity.

¹
Ibid., p. 1039.

²
Albert Béguin, Bernanos par lui-même, p. 166.

³
Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1488.

⁴
Ibid., p. 1358.

⁵
Ibid., p. 1367.

⁶
Ibid., p. 1368.

Other images of "solitude" which permit Bernanos to situate the supernatural in the everyday reality of the world in which his characters live are characterized by desolate landscapes,¹ devastated by wind and rain,² shrouded in primeval darkness³ and often enveloped in the silence of death.⁴ Occasionally, one is made to feel the stifling heat of a region that exudes the foul breath of ferment and decay.⁵ But more often than not the atmosphere is very humid,⁶ bitterly cold,⁷ and the silent night envelops the earth to make the supernatural appear quite ordinary.

Degraded to the level of animals and infested by disease, the inhabitants of Bernanos' villages are terrorized by their exposure to the violence and chaos of an alien land which seems designed solely to bring about their destruction. It is a realm in which the constant and pervasive sense of evil radiates the awful presence of Satan, the prince of this world, isolating man from God.

¹ Georges Bernanos, Une Nuit, p. 17; Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 155; Un Crime, p. 733.

² Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 155; Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1113; La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, p. 1269.

³ Georges Bernanos, Une Nuit, p. 18; Ibid., p. 28; Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 163; Ibid., p. 184; Un Crime, p. 727; Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1113; Monsieur Ouine, p. 1474.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 144; Ibid., p. 163; Ibid., p. 165; L'Imposture, p. 371; Un Crime, p. 732; Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1113.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, Une Nuit, p. 18; Monsieur Ouine, p. 1349.

⁶ Georges Bernanos, Dialogue d'Ombres, p. 42; Ibid., p. 43; Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 155; Un Crime, p. 799; Ibid., p. 812; Monsieur Ouine, p. 1474.

⁷ Georges Bernanos, Une Nuit, p. 32; Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 152; Ibid., p. 155; Ibid., p. 165; Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1142; Monsieur Ouine, p. 1476.

In 1936, as Bernanos wrote about his most recent novel Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, he used a phrase which describes the situation of his central character as being "... à la limite du visible et de l'invisible--"¹. This description which appears equally applicable to the rest of the author's fiction, helps us to perceive the aim that led the writer to choose the specific image patterns that are prevalent throughout his work. Bernanos clearly visualized that the nature of the catastrophe facing modern man was spiritual. As a deeply devout Christian writer, he was personally committed to the task of making mankind aware of the impending crisis. In order to do this successfully, he found it imperative to create a décor, an atmosphere which would permit him to transport his characters beyond the confines of the physical world and situate them "à la limite du visible et de l'invisible--". The image clusters that we have examined are thus specifically selected to evoke the presence of a supernatural universe that corresponds with the writer's vision. Moreover, they mirror the unwholesome moral and spiritual nature of the Bernanosian world where all the characters save the "saints" seem to have become mortally infected. Indeed, each sinner appears to be dying internally since the spring of life, divine love, is frozen at its source. The images selected by Georges Bernanos cannot but reveal the intense Christian fervour that inspires and motivates both the writer and the man.

¹ Michel Estève, "Notes", Oeuvres Romanesques, p. 1847.

CHAPTER II

The movement away from God

The "solitude" of the sinners

Mediocrity and "les imbéciles"

Being a Christian writer, Bernanos is acutely aware of the catastrophe that has befallen modern man. As we have observed in Chapter I, the author recognized that European man has mistakenly placed more faith in materialism and in technological progress than in the Christian ideal, and through the neglect of Christian values, has in fact rejected his spiritual essence as a being made in the Creator's image. For Bernanos, the "imbécile" and the "médiocre" resemble each other. However, the distinction between them is so subtle that until we examine them carefully, it would be impossible to divide them into separate categories. For example, in La Liberté pour quoi faire? Bernanos uses the terms synonymously and even implies that there are no differences:

Oh! il est certainement parmi
vous de ces hommes du dehors
que scandalise profondément
la sécurité des chrétiens
médiocres, sécurité qui
ressemble à la légendaire
sécurité des imbéciles-probable-
ment parce que c'est la même...

¹

Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 267.

Elsewhere in the same work both terms are again applied to those who reject the risk and the self-sacrifice of absolute love that are inherent in the principles of Christianity:

...ils n'ont pas voulu courir
le risque de la sincérité,
de la simplicité, de la
grandeur, ils tombent dans
le médiocre sans comprendre
que la plus extraordinaire,
la plus hasardeuse, la plus
fantastique entreprise, c'est
encore de subsister en imbéciles
dans un univers ruisselant de
beauté...¹

We shall therefore assume that both terms convey identical meanings until the distinction is made clear at the end of this chapter.

The "imbécile" is the individual who remains ignorant of the true meaning of his supernatural heritage and therefore of his spiritual needs. Living in a physical world, he imagines that his happiness is involved only with worldly values. Moreover, by abdicating his moral and spiritual responsibility to recover his lost innocence and thereby minister to his eternal needs, the "imbécile" further defiles his nature. His failure to cultivate an interior life leads to the gradual disappearance of his spiritual faith and to his separation from the Creator. This divorce from the source of love seriously impairs the "imbécile's" capacity for love. A growing emptiness in his life develops and induces him to fill the existing void by placing his belief, his faith, in other ideals that are

¹
Ibid., p. 106.

chiefly progressive, in keeping with the technological advances made by twentieth century man. It is precisely because he lacks Christian faith that the individual becomes an "imbécile". The distinction is clarified as the writer discusses his position with regard to "imbéciles":

--Quel miracle?-- D'être
chrétien, voilà le miracle.
Si je n'étais chrétien, je ¹
serais évidemment un imbécile,...

From the outset of his career as a novelist Bernanos can be heard constantly fulminating against the many facets of evil that are linked with human experience. Imbecility and mediocrity are thus frequently castigated and denounced. However, this aversion gradually disappears for the writer soon recognised that the stigma was a contemporary affliction common to all:

Il y a un principe de médiocrité
en chacun de nous, en chacun des
hommes de nos générations mal-
heureuses, et on le reconnaît
même chez les plus grands.²

In consequence he takes care not to be guilty of the same ^{error} committed by Dr. Delbende in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne. The curé of Torcy outlines the doctor's dangerous error to the curé of Ambricourt:

... tout le mal est venu peut-
être de ce qu'il haïssait les
médiocres. On devrait prendre
garde, vois-tu. Le médiocre

¹ Georges Bernanos, Les Enfants Humiliés, p. 195.

² Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 67.

est un piège du démon. La médiocrité est trop compliquée pour nous, c'est l'affaire de Dieu. En attendant, le médiocre devrait trouver un abri dans notre ombre, sous nos ailes, un abri, au chaud - ils ont ¹ besoin de chaleur pauvres diables!

By examining the character portraits of the "imbéciles" whose representatives are drawn from the clergy, from the literary profession and from a medical background, we shall see that man's severance from his fellows, his tragic amputation from God can only be aggravated by religious apathy. We will also accept the author's conviction that total spiritual involvement through Christian faith is the only possible solution. On meeting the "imbécile", we witness as well the accuracy of the author's statement that "l'idée du Progrès leur apporte l'espèce de pain dont ils ont besoin." ² Abbé Sabiroux, the curé of Luzarne in Sous le soleil de Satan, and the Bishop of Paumiers, Mgr. Espelette of L'Imposture, both faithfully reflect the contemporary progressive viewpoint. We are told that Sabiroux is "fidèle à sa classe, à son temps, aux idées de son temps," ³ and that Mgr. Espelette, "l'évêque de Paumiers croit [-il] au Progrès, et il s'est fait de ce Progrès une image à sa mesure." ⁴ Since the craving for personal gain and worldly success are other attributes of the "médiocre" it is not surprising that Sabiroux spends his time

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1123.

² Georges Bernanos, Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, p. 24.

³ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 241.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 388.

"tirant de toutes choses un petit profit,"¹ while the bishop does his utmost "de vivre et mourir à l'avantgarde de son siècle."²

To achieve this end he becomes part of a literary group whose members share the "médiocre" goal of personal advancement through intrigue. The Cartesian priest³ and former chemistry professor is no intriguer, yet like the bishop he is a shallow creature whose shortcomings are explained by the curé of Ambricourt in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne:

Je crois, je suis sûr que beaucoup d'hommes n'engagent jamais leur être, leur sincérité profonde. Ils vivent à la surface d'eux-mêmes, et le sol humain est si riche que cette mince couche superficielle suffit pour une maigre moisson, qui donne l'illusion d'une véritable destinée.⁴

Underdeveloped through his failure to cultivate an inner life, Sabiroux's superficiality prevents him from understanding spiritual matters. His loyalties remain divided between the Church and his scientific ideals. The same spirit of compromise reflects the mediocrity of Mgr. Espelette who has set equally conflicting goals for himself:

Car prêtre par état, et peut-être par vocation, une part de lui-même n'en conspire pas moins sans cesse contre l'ordre dont il est le gardien. Là est le tragique de sa misérable destinée.⁵

1
Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 241.

2
Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 387.

3
Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 255.

4
Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1115.

5
Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 388.

As Bernanos describes the violent conflict that rages in the soul of this ecclesiastic, he appears to be stating a principle that is typical of all "imbéciles". Their lack of faith seems to lead inexorably to the tragedy of "solitude".

In Les Grands cimetières sous la lune Bernanos points out that the principle of self-sacrifice implicit in the ideal of greatness is beyond the meager capacity of the "imbécile".¹ As we have seen in the introduction of this chapter, such people avoid all personal risk. Sabiroux's attitude is therefore typical. He deplores "le désordre causé dans une juridiction paisible par un de ces hommes miraculeux qui bouleversent tous les calculs."²

Mgr. Espelette, like Sabiroux, is unwilling to become involved. Although the Catholic journalist Pernichon confesses that he is burdened by a spiritual and moral crisis which leaves him incapable of prayer and which is driving him to suicide,³ the admission falls on deaf ears. The charity required by such an appeal is alien to the nature of the bishop, and he refuses to risk his security.⁴

A peculiar trait of the "médiocres" is their hatred of others. We cannot but note the gaze of anger and disdain that M. Gambillet, the doctor, Saint-Marin the intellectual and the curé of Luzarne direct at one another as they stand, "tous les trois, sous la lumière de la lampe, face à face, ainsi que d'irréconciliables

¹ Georges Bernanos, Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, p. 24.

² Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 241.

³ Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 416.

⁴ Ibid., p. 424.

ennemis."¹ Mgr. Espelette is also contemptuous of those around him: "il a des hommes le même mépris qu'un notaire ou qu'un policier, mais inconscient, stupide, inaltérable."² Generating a climate of anger, the hatred of mediocre characters unleashes vicious and disruptive forces that the writer uses to portray the "imbécile" as the wretched abandoned creature that he is. For example, the agonized distress of Sabiroux is presented with a great deal of sympathy:

Le suprême effort de certains hommes simples, ... est un spectacle si tragique et d'une amertume si profonde et secrète qu'on ne saurait rien y comparer que la mort d'un petit enfant. C'est en vain qu'ils retournent pas à pas, de souvenir en souvenir, qu'ils épellent leur vie, lettre à lettre... Ils sont devenus comme étrangers à leur propre aventure; ils ne s'y reconnaissent plus. Le tragique les a traversés de part en part, pour en tuer un autre à côté.³

The agony of separation that Mgr. Espelette experiences is also described by Bernanos. He will, however, use this example to generalize on the torment of those who are "médiocres" and to indicate that it stems from their lack of communion with God:

On ne pense qu'à l'infortune des fous, et tel sot connaît pourtant une pire solitude. Certaine médiocrité d'âme,

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 293.

² Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 415.

³ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 249.

partout vénielle, peut faire
de la vie d'un prêtre une
aventure absurde et tragique.¹

The theme of the isolated and aging man of letters forms one of the recurring patterns of Bernanos' work and dates from his first short story Madame Dargent, published between the years 1919-1921. This theme appears in another early short story, Dialogue d'Ombres, published in 1928, and emerges once more in Sous le soleil de Satan where we meet the cynical academician, Saint-Marin. Variations on this theme occur with the young Catholic journalist, Pernichon, and the silver haired historian-academician, Monsieur de Clergerie in L'Imposture. Finally, in Un Mauvais Rêve, Bernanos portrays another aging and lonely novelist who loses touch with those around him as his creative powers decrease. None of these personages plays a principal role, yet each possesses features which mark him with the unmistakable seal of mediocrity. All, therefore, are tormented beings.

We have seen that a basic characteristic of the "imbécile" is a predisposition towards the pursuit of worldly pleasure. Pernichon the Catholic journalist of L'Imposture, is typical. He displays "trop de hâte à jouir de certains biens de ce monde."² Saint-Marin, the greying novelist and academician, has also indulged his appetite for material things. He definit^ely admits to Sabiroux:

J'ai pris de la vie tout ce que
j'ai pu prendre, entendez-vous,

¹
Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 388.

²
Ibid., p. 410.

à grandes lampées la gorge
 pleine! Je l'ai bue à la
 régalaide: advienne que pourra!
 Il faut en prendre son parti,
 abbé.¹

Pernichon possesses a similar greed, although his ambitions will
 ever elude him:

J'avais quitté Aurillac plein
 d'illusions: je souhaitais
 être un journaliste--qui
 sait? peut-être un écrivain...
 J'avais une recommandation du
 vicaire général...²

Antoine Saint-Marin will realize his ambition. However, the publi-
 cation of thirty celebrated books will cost him half a century of
 toil.³ This lifelong devotion to the pursuit of non-spiritual goals
 is reprehensible to Bernanos since it indicates a wholesale neglect of
 Christian values and thus an undeveloped inner life. Both Saint-Marin
 and Pernichon are obsessed with sexual desires. The first "n'est
 accessible que par les sens,"⁴ while the second admits, "la sensualité
 m'éprouve sans cesse."⁵ To Bernanos, such a preoccupation is an
 attempt at surmounting the torment in one's soul.

Since neither Saint-Marin nor Pernichon has seen fit to
 develop an inner life, both are superficial creatures. Saint-Marin
 is incapable of understanding that Donissan is inspired to violent
 acts of self-sacrifice because of his love for God. The evidence of
 the future saint's self-flagellation, the blood-spattered wall of
 his room, thus shatters Saint-Marin's peace of mind: "la vue fit

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 292.

² Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 420.

³ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 297.

⁴ Ibid., p. 289.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 317.

chanceler un moment sa raison".¹ Pernichon's inner tranquillity is equally disoriented: "Sa vie intérieure est même trouble, équivoque, jamais aérée, malsaine."² This longing for escapism of the two men of letters provides us with vital evidence of their inner affliction.

As we have observed, another constantly recurring characteristic of the "imbécile" is his hatred for others like himself. The journalist is thus typical:

L'injustice commise envers les
siens suscite aussitôt non la
révolte, pas même une lâche
complaisance, mais, dans le
double recès de son âme femelle,
la haine de l'opprimé, l'ignoble
amour du vainqueur.³

We note from his accusation that his colleagues all display the same hostility towards him:

En vérité, depuis deux mois,
il m'est impossible de faire
un pas, de prononcer une
syllable, d'écrire une ligne
sans rencontrer une sorte
d'hostilité...⁴

The hatred that Pernichon encounters from everyone, his frenzied efforts for survival⁵ and his eventual denunciation by all, indicate that the journalist is struggling against the forces of imbecility that condemn

1
Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 300.

2
Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 315.

3
Ibid., p. 315.

4
Ibid., p. 397.

5
Ibid., p. 397.

him to exile. The alienating effect of hatred is more easily understood in conjunction with the author's comments on the "imbécile":

... croyant s'indigner contre autrui, (ils) s'animent seulement contre eux-mêmes, contre leur propre remords, comme les chats mystérieux jouent avec leur ombre.¹

This indignation that they feel for themselves and for one another helps to determine and ensure their condition of estrangement.

Perhaps one of the most glaring defects of certain imbecilic characters is that devouring curiosity which drives them to steal the secrets of others in order to use them as weapons of torment and destruction. Bernanos observes in his first novel that this curiosity becomes a powerful factor of alienation since it expresses itself as an urge to know that is sought for the specific purpose of destruction: "Connaître pour détruire, et renouveler dans la destruction sa connaissance et son désir - o Soleil de Satan."² Responsible for the separation of man from God, since the Fall was engineered by the serpent's appeal to human curiosity, this failing is shared by numerous minor and secondary characters. By pointing out that the cynical Saint-Marin displays this avid and sterile desire to gain knowledge for its own sake,³ Bernanos indicates another feature of this individual. His curiosity, we learn, masks a sincere feeling that is equally characteristic: "une crainte sordide de la mort."⁴

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 293.

² Ibid., p. 237.

³ Ibid., p. 280.

⁴ Ibid., p. 282.

It should be noted however, that "imbéciles" are not the only people who become conscious of this "solitude" and helplessness when confronted with death. Even the most elevated characters, the "saints", experience these same sensations of terror whenever death seems imminent. However, their fear of death is eventually overcome by their deep Christian faith. The "imbéciles" have no such faith to draw upon.

The image of death that haunts Saint-Marín serves to indicate the isolation he endures. Bernanos focuses attention upon the atrocious suffering that is its consequence:

C'est alors qu'entre ce vieux corps inerte et la volupté vainement pressée la mort se leva, comme un troisième camarade... il s'efforce d'en chasser la pensée, de la déguiser au moins; il dépense à ce jeu misérable des ressources infinies. A peine ose-t-il confier aux plus intimes quelque chose de son angoisse, et ils ne l'entendent qu'à demi; nul ne veut voir, dans les yeux du grand homme, le regard tragique où s'exprime une terreur d'enfant. "Au secours!" dit le regard. Et l'auditoire s'écrie: "Quel merveilleux causeur!"¹

Although Saint-Marín visits Lumbres because of his
²curiosity to see a saint, his decision is also prompted by personal
³torment. His feelings are therefore sincere, arising naturally from
⁴his fear of dying. The vain attempts he makes at concealing this

¹
Ibid., pp. 282-283.

²
Ibid., p. 281.

³
Ibid., p. 282.

⁴
Ibid., p. 282.

suffering from others,¹ his desperate and equally unsuccessful employment of vice and literature as escapist remedies,² reveal the emptiness of his existence. Because of his corruption, Saint-Marin leads the life of a man pursued: "A mesure qu'il avance en âge, le misérable, se voit traqué, forcé dans son mensonge,..."³ Tormented by the realization that he is imprisoned in a life of imposture, the illustrious old man feels as though he is being catapulted towards the abyss.⁴ His fears are increased by the question of Sabiroux. Isn't his solitude engineered by "l'idée d'une déchéance absolue, irrémédiable, d'une dissipation dans le néant?"⁵ Like other imbecilic souls, the unfortunate wretch will continue his attempts "de rompre le cercle enchanté."⁶ His senile obsession with sanctity stems from a deep-seated need for purity. He hopes that a conversion to faith through contact with the saint de Lumbres will allow him to die at peace with himself and his world.⁷

Pernichon finds himself in similar circumstances.

Whereas the sinister germ of curiosity is not developed in the journalist, he is nonetheless plagued by the same inner fears. His dread of hell⁸ tends to indicate a similar terror of death. Further, like

¹
Ibid., p. 282.

²
Ibid., pp. 291-292.

³
Ibid., p. 282.

⁴
Ibid., p. 290.

⁵
Ibid., p. 290.

⁶
Ibid., p. 304.

⁷
Ibid., p. 305.

⁸
Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 315.

1

Saint-Marin, the neglect of his inner life and his enslavement in
 an existence of imposture² have propelled him towards "le néant."³
 After his cruel unmasking by abbé Cénabre, the wretched Pernichon
 feels his "solitude" very keenly and gives vent to his despair:

Il s'écarta de quelques pas, ...
 soufflant par le nez d'affreux
 sanglots sans larmes, ramassé
 sur lui-même, contracté ainsi
 que d'une énorme grimace non
 du visage seul, mais de tout
 son corps chétif. Puis ce
 désespoir grotesque disparut...⁴

The abandonment of Pernichon by his spiritual advisor
 sets in motion the hostility and treachery of the group to which he
 belongs and provokes his final dismissal by their leader. Defenceless
 and alone, he can scarcely endure the spiritual wretchedness of his
 exile. Just as Saint-Marin visits a saint, so too Pernichon seeks
 to alleviate his grief by appealing to a priest. Recognizing his
 spiritual contamination, Pernichon develops a sincere craving for
 purity. Yet success is impossible for he cannot pray.⁵ His inner
 torment becomes so great that he decides to destroy himself.⁶ When
 the confession of his suffering fails to awaken the charity of Mgr.
 Espelette, the young man finally takes his life.

Because of the empty spiritual life of the "imbéciles",
 their "solitude" induces them to search for some form of escape, "l'oubli".

¹
Ibid., p. 320.

²
Ibid., p. 320.

³
Ibid., p. 320.

⁴
Ibid., p. 323.

⁵
Ibid., p. 418.

⁶
Ibid., p. 416.

Quite naturally, they resort to remedies that are characteristically material in nature. The means of escape that Pernichon and Saint-Marin choose are sexual debauchery, and worldly recognition through writing. But drugs, alcohol, art, science, wanderlust, sleep and even prayer are other means that individuals use in attempting to create an artificial paradise that might soothe the pain of social and spiritual alienation. The profound suffering of these human beings however, testifies to the inefficacy of such palliatives. In this opinion Bernanos appears to be reaffirming the agonized confession of Charles Baudelaire that reechoes throughout Les Fleurs du Mal.

Another of Bernanos' literary characters is the historian and academician, Monsieur de Clergerie, who appears in both L'Imposture and La Joie. He is a widower who lives with his daughter Chantal and his demented mother, Mme de Clergerie.

Akin to both Saint-Marin and Pernichon, M. de Clergerie considers it legitimate to satisfy his craving for worldly recognition:

... chaque homme se trace d'avance
un chemin, fait sa carrière, attend
la consécration d'une réussite
suprême, décisive: un emploi, une
charge, un titre, parfois la gloire.¹

Like Pernichon, he makes his way in life through intrigue. Like Saint-
Marin, he squanders long years to win renown.² M. de Clergerie appears
to be an incarnation of imbecility. With the divided loyalties of
science and religion, he strives to win fame at the expense of his

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 580.

² Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 499.

daughter's security. His neglect of Christian values makes him a superficial person, incapable of understanding the mysteries of the supernatural. His envy of his rivals and contempt for his colleagues indicate a petty nature. He is weak and awed by the idea of greatness. In a variant not utilized in the final manuscript, Bernanos explains that M. de Clergerie is incapable of the dignity of risk and consequently an alien soul:

La vie d'un homme libre est un échange perpétuel, une sorte de partie magnifique, un risque. L'idée même de ce risque semble absurde à l'auteur de L'Histoire du Jansénisme. Il ne veut jouer qu'à coup sûr, et cette prétention lui paraît si légitime qu'il la suppose toujours chez autrui. De là son affreuse solitude.¹

This statement should be regarded as a characteristic condition of imbecility when we consider the author's unequivocal stand on the question of spiritual risk in Les Grands cimetières sous la lune:

Le monde est au Risque. Il y a là de quoi faire éclater de rire les Sages dont la morale est celle de l'épargne. Mais s'ils ne risquent rien eux-mêmes, ils vivent du risque des autres... Le Monde est au risque. Le Monde sera demain à qui risquera le plus, prendra plus fermement son risque.²

1

Michel Estève, "Notes", Oeuvres Romanesques, p. 1775.

2

Georges Bernanos, Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, pp. 36-37.

Bernanos goes to great lengths to portray the inner turmoil of M. de Clergerie which appears to date from his school days. The madness of his mother leaves him unable to communicate with the one person he understands and truly loves. The early death of his wife together with his inability to understand the spiritual purity of his daughter, increase his isolation. It is the anguish of his loneliness which drives him to try to fill the void in his life that begins in the emptiness of his household:

(Il) ne songe plus qu'à remplir sa maison vide. Dans sa hâte à rassembler autour de lui, vaille que vaille, ce qu'il a pu trouver d'amis bénévoles et qu'il accueille avidement pour les délaisser le lendemain, il fait penser au moribond qui tire à soi, contre sa poitrine, une présence invisible, s'en recouvre.¹

With no one to turn to and no faith in God, the historian falls prey to the deathly emptiness that has become the secret agony of his life:

Mais sa vie a un autre secret, un autre principe de mort. Ce vide étrange, où achève de se perdre un labeur de tant d'années, gagne sans cesse, et voilà que le sol même manque sous ses pieds.²

Ganse, the aging novelist of Un Mauvais Rêve is filled with self-disgust for having run out of ideas. His inability to rise to the stature of greatness through a refusal to take risks,³ his

¹
Ibid., p. 630.

²
Ibid., pp. 630-631.

³
Michel Estève, "Notes", Oeuvres Romanesques, p. 1775.

avid curiosity and hatred of those around him,¹ stamp this unbeliever as typically "médiocre". He has devoted a considerable amount of energy to literature and lives chiefly through the imaginary creatures of his fiction. He is horrified at finding himself "au bout du rouleau." His infertile imagination has rendered him impotent. Although his life is empty of all but literary abortions, he refuses to accept the loss of his productivity. As with Saint-Marin and M. de Clergerie, the slavish devotion to literature is merely a mask for concealing his personal "néant". In desperation, Ganse determines to save face, with another lie if necessary. He plans to exploit his "enfance" by using it as the subject matter for another composition. Simone Alfieri, his private secretary, warns him against contaminating the sole remaining part of himself that is of worth.² Eventually he is forced into the admission that "La littérature n'a jamais délivré personne."³ The realization obliges him to lean more heavily upon Simone without whom he cannot satisfy his editors. However, Mme. Alfieri forsakes him as does Olivier and Philippe, his two other collaborators. When Simone departs, Ganse is left to cope with the "solitude" he fears more than death.

It is impossible to examine Bernanos' portrayal of four literary figures without drawing some conclusions about the author's views on what constitutes good literature. One cannot overlook the

¹ Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 916.

² Ibid., p. 919.

³ Ibid., p. 922.

distinctly Christian character of his writing. Further, his work communicates the moral responsibility and the dedication of the writer. Above all, it reflects his spiritual involvement and illustrates his vocation of bearing witness to the Truth. Literature in Bernanos' estimation can therefore only be worthwhile if it deals with the domain of the supernatural. It ought to be concerned with the world of sin and the realm of grace, the portrayal of man's hope and his despair, his refusal or acceptance of absolute love. Such writing naturally pre-supposes the presence of both Satan and God. The accuracy of this viewpoint appears to be borne out by Bernanos' attitude to the work of Anatole France, whose skepticism he finds despicable. In an interview with Frédéric Lefèvre, who intimates that the character of Saint-Marin is a cynical portrait of Anatole France, Bernanos makes the following accusation about the latter's writing:

Son oeuvre est vile. Ce n'était qu'un jeu, dit-on. Mais quel jeu? Jouer avec l'espérance des hommes, c'est duper la faim et la soif du pauvre. Il y a peut-être aujourd'hui dans le monde tel ou tel misérable, fait pour se rassasier de certitude et qui meurt désespéré parce que l'auteur de Thaïs avait de l'esprit, savait sa langue. Cela, c'est la faute que rien ne rédime, c'est le crime essentiel, absolu.¹

For Bernanos, France is irresponsible in a Christian sense. He refuses to hold himself accountable for the tragic circumstances that his agnosticism might provoke. In fact, literature for him is

¹

Georges Bernanos, Le Crépuscule des Vieux, p. 75.

little more than an excuse for intellectual acrobatics, an empty display of intelligence for its own sake. Irresponsibility in this perspective is the equivalent of evil, according to Bernanos; it indicates a lack of Christian principles, an incapacity for divine love, and an unwillingness to take supernatural risks:

Dieu n'a pas voulu nous faire
irresponsables, je veux dire
incapables d'amour, car il
n'y a pas de responsabilité
sans liberté et l'amour est
un choix libre, ou il n'est
rien.¹

Yet Bernanos' wholesale indictment of non-Catholic literature is far too limited in scope. His evaluation automatically condemns as irresponsible all literary men whose work is not primarily concerned with spiritual values. The works of such great writers as Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Stendhal, Gide, Proust, Sartre and Camus, to name only a few French novelists, would be considered second rate in his eyes. Those who regard Christianity as a vital influence in the world would perhaps tend to agree with Bernanos' view. Those who do not, would quite rightly consider it unacceptable.

We shall see that the main qualities characterizing our literary and clerical groups are also typical of our scientific circle of "imbéciles". As a Christian, Bernanos mistrusts the rationalist outlook of medical practitioners who believe that man

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 274.

can solve his problems by himself. This opinion contradicts the Christian notion of original sin wherein man is a fallen creature who must look outside himself for the salvation he needs and whose only hope is to participate in the Redemption by Christ.

In the author's work scientific knowledge seems to stand in direct opposition to religious faith and the novelist appears preoccupied with making his readers aware that the faith science inspires in its adherents is not merely misplaced but absurd. The truth seems to be that Bermanos is opposed to an overall reliance on psychoanalysis that is typical of medical men who depend on science to explain everything beyond their comprehension. By posing problems for which scientific knowledge can offer no solutions, the writer implies that each grain of knowledge gained through research and observation is counterbalanced by an accumulation of mysteries that remain unfathomed and apparently unfathomable.

Yet the power of suggestion through a series of unresolved questions is only one of the means the writer adopts to illustrate his mistrust of science. He also uses direct statement to prove that science is far from being the reservoir of precise and indisputable

factual knowledge that it is supposed to be. His conclusion about the medical diagnosis concerning the supernatural distress of "solitude" that contorts the face of Chantal offers a significant example. It is the curé of Ambricourt who makes the observation in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne:

... j'avais devant moi maintenant un visage étrange, défiguré non par la peur mais par une panique plus profonde, plus intérieure. Oui, j'ai l'expérience d'une certaine altération des traits assez semblable, seulement je ne l'avais observée jusqu'alors que sur des faces d'agonisants et je lui attribuais, naturellement, une cause banale, physique. Les médecins parlent volontiers du "masque de l'agonie". Les médecins se trompent souvent.¹

A further implication is obvious. Since physicians often make blunders about the maladies of the human body which they profess to know intimately, how can they be relied upon to diagnose accurately the ills of the human soul about which they know nothing?

Perhaps the most convincing method of totally rejecting science as a tool for the analysis of the human soul (and thus as a means of unraveling the mysteries of the spiritual universe), occurs in the negative portraits of medical men whose blind faith in science is counterbalanced by a lack of faith in God. Bernanos is anxious to discredit the view of such individuals whose tendency is to explain the mysteries of the universe strictly in terms of their scientific

¹
Ibid., p. 1135.

and technological background and training. Oddly enough, their rationalist philosophies seem incapable of finding a solution to their personal hell.

The two psychiatrists of Bernanos' novels are both atheists and therefore, according to Bernanos, "imbéciles". Dr. La Pérouse of La Joie differs but little from Dr. Lipotte of Un Mauvais Rêve. Both are portrayed as having the consuming curiosity that is typical. Under the pretext of freeing his patient from his misery, Lipotte seeks to draw out his innermost secrets. For La Pérouse, this passion has become a "dangerous pleasure" and drives him to victimize M. de Clergerie.

Both men are given to leading a life of imposture. La Pérouse repudiates the man of science that he is supposed to be and the life of dedication to science that he has led.¹ The devotion that Lipotte has displayed towards the arts is likewise counterfeit.²

As La Pérouse victimizes his patients, so Lipotte is cruel to and contemptuous of those around him, while the clandestine relationship between the physician and the debauched Fiodor has its counterpart in Lipotte's secret affinity with certain illustrious members of the underworld. The two doctors share a similar aversion to greatness through a refusal of risk and self-sacrifice and both are deeply disturbed by a sense of shame. Whereas Lipotte expresses these feelings to Ganse,³ La Pérouse makes his confession to Chantal.⁴

1

Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 668.

2

Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 934.

3

Ibid., p. 937.

4

Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 660.

Moreover, the two psychiatrists have an abject fear of death. Ganse taunts Lipotte with this terror,¹ while La Pérouse reveals his own fear in conversation with Chantal.² La Pérouse's masquerade, like Lipotte's, has corrupted his inner life. This is recognizable in his admission to Chantal that he is incapable of love: "Réellement, je n'ai rien aimé... qu'aurais-je aimé?"³ Later on, we witness the deeply moving spectacle of this physician who, with increasing despair, sees himself as a lost soul because of his failure to love: "Le mot aimer n'a plus aucun sens pour moi, et cela ne saurait s'exprimer dans un autre langage."⁴ We get some indication of La Pérouse's misery by the reaction it inspires in Chantal:

Vous autres, vous avez vécu,
souffert, offensé Dieu, que
sais-je? Vous avez vos re-
grets, vos remords, vous êtes
comme de vieux militaires,
avec leurs cicatrices... Notre-
Seigneur ne se lasse pas de vous
pardonner; vous êtes tout ruisselants
du sang de la Croix.⁵

Sincerely scandalized by the corruption of his spiritual life, the doctor bursts into tears: "-Vraiment, dit-il, je pleure? Hé bien, ne regardez pas, ce sont des larmes de honte."⁶ We cannot but feel deeply sympathetic towards this man who finally admits his distress at finding nothing in his whole existence worthy of offering the chaste Chantal.⁷

¹ Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 942.

² Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 667.

³ Ibid., p. 668.

⁴ Ibid., p. 669.

⁵ Ibid., p. 671.

⁶ Ibid., p. 673.

⁷ Ibid., p. 673.

That La Pérouse uses drugs seems evident from his conversation with Fiodor.¹ Lipotte likewise uses them to escape from the anguish which afflicts him.² Therefore, when he talks about the dissolution of Christianity and generalizes on the suffering experienced by Olivier Mainville and others like him, it appears certain that both himself and La Pérouse should be included in his observation:

Le christianisme a beau se
dissoudre peu à peu de lui-
même, notre monde occidental
n'arrive pas à éliminer les
plus subtils, les plus veni-
meux de ses poisons. Tous
ces gens n'ont l'air empressés
que de jouir, mais ils ont
quelque part, dans un coin
secret de leur vie, un autel
dédié à la souffrance.³

But however numerous and spectacular their shortcomings, the sins of the "médiocre" dwindle in importance for Bernanos when measured against the profound suffering caused by their exile. Although then, he detests mediocrity, it cannot be said that he hates mediocre people. In La Liberté pour quoi faire? the writer expresses the deep compassion and love he feels for them:

Mais je ne peux pas m'empêcher
de les aimer, je me sens terrible-
ment solidaire de ces gens qui
n'ont pas encore trouvé ce que
j'ai reçu moi-même sans l'avoir
mérité, sans l'avoir seulement
demandé, dont je jouis dès le
berceau, pour ainsi dire, et par
une sorte de privilège⁴ dont la
gratuité m'épouvante.⁴

¹
Ibid., p. 651.

²
Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 942.

³
Ibid., p. 941.

⁴
Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 267.

After carefully examining the nature of this race of men it is somewhat easier to detect the subtle differences between "imbécile" and "médiocre". The "médiocre" differs from the "imbécile" by being intellectually sound. Both Saint-Marin and Monsieur de Clergerie are academicians. Ganse is a successful novelist and the two doctors have won renown in the medical profession. All are intelligent enough to recognize that materialist goals ought not to dominate their existence. Yet they stubbornly cling to a lifestyle based on rationalism and often adopt an attitude of self-sufficiency. Perhaps the emphasis placed on the intellect is one of the chief flaws in these characters. It inclines them towards a neglect of Christian virtues. Certainly, it is this spiritual and moral cowardice which obliges them to reject God. It is significant that all without exception are either atheists or agnostics and are consequently tormented beings.

"Imbéciles" have less than average intellectual ability. Pernichon and Mgr. Espelette are little better than mental retards who have to depend upon intrigue for their advancement. Sabiroux is described by Bernanos as "ce prêtre stupide."¹ They are all mentally shallow creatures who mechanically carry out religious observances in the belief that they are performing their Christian duty. In Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, Bernanos points out that the "imbécile"² "n'explore que la surface de son être." Although Pernichon, Sabiroux

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 291.

² Georges Bernanos, Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, p. 6.

and Mgr. Espelette are all practicing Catholics, their superficiality prevents them from understanding spiritual matters. Easily duped, they frequently confuse God with Satan. Convinced that they are furthering the cause of good, they unwittingly advance the cause of evil by becoming the incarnation of lies and imposture. Whereas the "médiocre" unconsciously reject their Christian heritage, the "imbécile" is a victim of his own ignorance. Both are expelled from the security and "joie" associated with the supernatural order of God. We shall see that their suffering also makes captives of "les enfants humiliés".

CHAPTER III

The movement away from God

The "solitude" of the sinners

"Les enfants humiliés"

A proper understanding of what constitutes for Bernanos "l'esprit d'enfance" is indispensable to our study of the theme of the humiliated child in the perspective of alienation.

Il n'est guère de personnage, dans toute l'oeuvre de Bernanos, qui un jour ne se retourne vers son enfance et ne garde obscurément, même au sein de la pire dégradation, la nostalgie d'une aube pure de la vie.¹

These words of Albert Béguin concerning "l'esprit d'enfance" testify to the special significance which Georges Bernanos accords this theme in his fiction.

It would seem that the individual's awareness of his sinful nature coupled with his spiritual craving for innocence serve to point out that man, for Bernanos, instinctively recognizes his spiritual heritage for it is surely his "enfance" which permits him to preserve the knowledge that he was made in the image of God. This opinion seems to be in accord with the accurate observation of Albert Béguin about Bernanos:

¹

Albert Béguin, Bernanos par lui-même, p. 5.

L'enfance n'est pas pour lui, ...
 ce qui est perdu à jamais, mais
 au contraire ce qui subsiste
 en dépit des erreurs et des
 errances, la part de l'être
 la plus profonde, celle qui
 est permanente et indestruct-
 ible, même lorsque la vie,
 l'irruption des instincts,
 l'affreuse curiosité, le
 plus affreux mensonge ont
 paru l'offenser et démentir
 sa grandeur. Car c'est, très
 précisément la part en chacun
 de nous qui est digne d'être
 sauvée. Non seulement digne
 de rédemption, mais positive-
 ment rédimée.¹

The purity of "enfance" is never totally obliterated in any of Bernanos' characters and the writer seldom fails to evoke some vestige of its presence that persists into the maturity of each individual. He frequently offers a revealing glimpse of the childhood of his characters in order to explain their motives for dis-
²
 simulation and revolt. For example, the childhood of Miss, abbé
³ ⁴ ⁵ ⁶
 Cénabre, M. de Clergerie, Evangéline, and M. Ouine, all appear momentarily and evoke our sympathy for the suffering and humiliations that have brought about their ruin. It is the seal of "enfance" that also induces even the vilest of sinners to experience profound regret at the loss of innocence that goes hand in hand with their emergence from adolescence into maturity. Bernanosian "enfance"

¹
 Ibid., p. 40.

²
 Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, pp. 1445-1446.

³
 Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, pp. 364-365.

⁴
 Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 535; pp. 536-537.

⁵
 Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, pp. 868-869.

⁶
 Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, pp. 1472-1473.

then is a saving grace that counteracts the spirit of revolt engendered by derelict Christian faith. It is the mark of divinity existing in each human being. For example, the curé of Ambricourt notes that in spite of the rebellious attitudes of Chantal¹ and S raphita,² they manage to preserve this mysterious adolescent purity. What Simone Alfieri explains to Ganse about "enfance" is even more significant. It will intercede on behalf of every individual as he comes face to face with death³ and is confronted by the Creator. Surely this is the reason why the satanic Monsieur Ouine pleads for "une nouvelle enfance"⁴ at the moment of death. As he states in his preface to Les Grands cimeti res sous la lune, Georges Bernanos is convinced that the human creature will be assessed on the basis of his "enfance"⁵ and either be saved or damned as a result of its worth.

The opinion that the "enfance" of each individual ought to be regarded as the most significant part of his life seems to have grown out of the religious experience of the young Bernanos⁶ when we consider the words of the Gospel: "I tell you, whosoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."⁷

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un cur  de campagne, pp. 1137-1138.

² Ibid., p. 1200.

³ Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais R ve, p. 919.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1554.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, Les Grands cimeti res sous la lune, pp. IV-V.

⁶ Nicole Winter, "Conception du Sacerdoce", "Etudes Bernanosiennes". La Revue de Lettres Modernes, (Hiver 1961-62), No. 67-68, p. 82.

⁷ Mark 10:15.

Yet we still need to ask ourselves what is the mystery of childhood that makes it so vital to Bernanos and to his characters. The words of the curé of Torcy to his friend, the curé of Ambricourt in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne seem to provide the answers although the opening remarks merely stress the importance of "enfance":

Hé bien, l'Eglise a été chargée
par le bon Dieu de maintenir
dans le monde cet esprit d'enfance,
cette ingénuité, cette fraîcheur.¹

We also note the priest's conviction that the "joie" of "enfance" originates in the child's feeling of helplessness:

D'où vient que le temps de notre
petite enfance nous apparaît si
doux, si rayonnant? Un gosse a
des peines comme tout le monde,
et il est, en somme, si désarmé
contre la douleur, la maladie!...
Mais c'est du sentiment de sa
propre impuissance que l'enfant
tire humblement le principe même
de sa joie... Hé bien, mon garçon,
si l'on nous avait laissés faire,
nous autres, l'Eglise eût donné
aux hommes cette espèce de sécurité
souveraine... Mais l'homme se serait²
su le fils de Dieu, voilà le miracle!

It becomes evident that the recognition and acceptance of his complete dependence, leads to a supernatural state of "sécurité souveraine". In short, it is the child's blind faith in the Father that assures His love, support and protection. "Enfance" then is not merely innocence, weakness or faith. It signifies as well a spirit of total self-

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne,
p. 1046.

² Ibid., p. 1045.

abnegation coupled with an eagerness for risk and adventure. When we scrutinize this definition we become aware that the precious secret of "enfance" is divine love. It is important to understand therefore that "l'esprit d'enfance" is in accord with the nature of the Creator, since in Biblical and Bernanosian context, He is "l'amour même"¹.

The term "enfants" then applies to those characters in the Bernanosian world who still maintain the essential Christian virtues. Although they are adolescents, the principal qualities that they share are innocence, idealism and simplicity. Further, they all tend to place blind but complete confidence in the justice and liberty of the adult world into which they are about to emerge. Above all, they possess a divine capacity for love. These characters, however, will all have their illusions shattered by the repeated experience of disappointment. The adult world from which they expect so much is one in which divine love has been either undermined or destroyed: "il n'y a qu'une erreur et qu'un malheur au monde, c'est de ne pas savoir assez aimer."² Characterized by lies, hatred, injustice and oppression, the adult world is thoroughly hostile to the "enfants" of Bernanos. With this conviction in mind, the writer makes a revealing statement in the album of a young Brazilian girl: "Ne devenez jamais une grande personne; Il y a un complot des grandes personnes contre l'enfance, et il suffit de lire l'Evangile pour s'en

¹
Ibid., p. 1158.

²
Georges Bernanos, Nous Autres Français, p. 151.

rendre compte."¹ The victimization of youth by society is well brought out in Les Enfants Humiliés where Bernanos explains the expiatory role that "enfance"² plays. In Monsieur Ouine he outlines the threat that the innocence of "enfance"³ poses to adults, and he records his conviction that society pursues and alienates "enfants".⁴

Having lost "l'esprit d'enfance", the adult members of society become imprisoned in a hell of their own making and unleash their growing hatred upon the younger generation. This victimization and alienation at the hands of society will in turn serve to undermine and destroy the Christian virtues of the "enfants". Deeply disillusioned at finding themselves in a world where there is little to believe in, less to hope for and no one to love, the "enfants" of Bernanos will finally become transformed into "enfants humiliés". Sooner or later their idealism will be eroded away by the repeated experience of disappointment and they will in turn be confined within the devil's enchanted circle of "solitude".

In his portraiture of "les enfants humiliés" as in that of "les imbéciles", Bernanos is undertaking, on one level at least, a study of the "solitude" of the human being. He therefore reveals the intense suffering that each encounters as he passes from adolescence to maturity.

The first of Bernanos' tortured adolescents, Germaine Malorthy, is typical in that she possesses a highly developed capacity

¹ Albert Béguin, Bernanos par lui-même, p. 96.

² Georges Bernanos, Les Enfants Humiliés, p. 68.

³ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1463.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 1463-1464.

for love and devotion:

A seize ans, Germaine savait aimer
(non point rêver d'amour, qui n'est
qu'un jeu de société) ... Germaine
savait aimer....¹

André Gaspard of Un Crime is the satellite and altar
boy of Evangéline, the false curé of Mégère. He displays the same
kind of avid and idealistic devotion, being ready to follow Evangéline
to the ends of the earth.²

Chantal is the rebel daughter of the Count and Countess
in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne. She resembles Germaine and
André by displaying an enormous capability for love and devotion
towards her Father: "Mon père était tout pour moi, un maître, un
roi, un dieu - un ami, un grand ami."³

Olivier Mainville and Philippe of Un Mauvais Rêve visual-
ize their employer, Ganse, as a celebrated novelist worthy of being
their master. Philippe expresses the deep admiration and hero worship
that both secretaries share for the aging man of letters:

Quand je le trouvais à six heures du
matin, dans son bureau plein de fumée,
tout gluant de sueur, les pattes noires
et la cendre de pipe dans chacune de ses
rides - je croyais voir Balzac, mon
coeur...⁴

Another Philippe, nicknamed Steeny in Monsieur Ouine,
convinces himself that the principal character is the idol for whom he
desperately craves. With the insolence of youth, he elevates Monsieur

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 68.

² Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 858.

³ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1136.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, pp. 893-894.

Ouine, this former language professor, to the status of a demi-god.¹

However, as Bernanos points out about Germaine, the nature of adolescent love and devotion is not limited to a curious desire for the experience of pleasure in physical love.² It involves as well a superior, self-sacrificial quality, the reckless desire for supernatural risk that is characteristic of the majority of Bernanos' adolescents. For example, Germaine grows bored and takes a lover. When her father learns of her pregnancy, she defies him by withholding Cadignan's name. She is determined to protect her beloved marquis with her life: "Décidez ce qui vous plaira, battez-moi, chassez-moi, je me tuerai... Mais je ne vous dirai rien, là, tout de même."³ André's willingness to go to any lengths for his idol is revealed in his outburst: "Où ne vous aurais-je pas suivi?... Je vous aurais suivi n'importe où!"⁴ Steeny makes a similar avowal of his devotion for Monsieur Ouine: "Je vous suivrais au bout du monde."⁵ The heroine of La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette demonstrates the same ardour for spiritual risk in protecting the poacher, Arsène. When his security is threatened, she furnishes him with an alibi. The fact that she must publicly admit to the loss of her virtue is of little consequence: "M. Arsène est mon amant, dit-elle avec une ridicule emphase. Interrogez-le si vous voulez: il vous répondra."⁶

¹ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1419.

² Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 68.

³ Ibid., p. 73.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 858.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1370.

⁶ Georges Bernanos, La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, p. 1326.

This self-sacrificial devotion typifies the absolute character of adolescent attachments.

Unfortunately however, the whole society in which adolescents live is hostile, as we note in the introduction to this chapter. Its members cannot respond to the profound yearning that adolescents have for love and affection.

The social climate of hostility that envelops Germaine is pinpointed by the author's comment: "L'obscur petite ville qu'elle avait bravée l'avait reprise, se refermait sur elle, la digérait."¹ Another youth, the priest of Ambricourt, senses that his village-parish exudes an aura of hostility. His fears that it will somehow victimize him and cause his death are expressed in his diary:

Quoi que je fasse, lui aurais-je donné
jusqu'à la dernière goutte de mon sang
(et c'est vrai que parfois j'imagine
qu'il m'a cloué là-haut sur une croix,
qu'il me regarde au moins mourir), je
ne le posséderais pas... Il m'aura comme
les autres, plus vite que les autres
sûrement.²

Yet it is often the highmindedness of youth that brings them into violent confrontation with society and is partly responsible for their alienation. André's passion for sincerity, devotion and supernatural risk make him a suitable candidate for the priesthood.³ These same high ideals however also cause his disillusionment, for it is his contact with the grossness and fraudulence of society that obliges him to live like an outsider, a recluse:

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 94.

² Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1061.

³ Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 756.

La solitude exaltée où s'était nourri si longtemps son jeune orgueil parmi ces hommes grossiers qu'il redoutait et méprisait à la fois, ne serait pas rompue en un jour, mais il la sentait toute prête à céder, à s'ouvrir, ainsi qu'un mur battu par la mer.¹

In exactly the same way Chantal is repelled by the odious discovery of vice among the servants of her household:

Nos domestiques sont des vrais singes... Bref, à dix ans, avant peut-être, je n'ignorais plus grand-chose. Cela me faisait horreur, pitié, je l'acceptais quand même, comme on accepte la maladie, la mort, beaucoup d'autres nécessités répugnantes auxquelles il faut bien se résigner.²

If she succeeds in resigning herself to the presence of evil in society, she finds it impossible to hide her revulsion at the horrifying truth about her father's affair with her governess. Because of Chantal's rectitude then, the Count's conduct drives her into the savage embrace of "solitude". This sense of revulsion that "enfants" feel as a result of the hypocrisy, the crass insensitivity of the adult generation, finds expression in the outburst of Philippe, and occasions the most profound despair:

Quoi! nous sommes ici comme des sages parmi les fous. Car les vieux sont fous, j'en suis sûr, la vieille est une démente. Il y a des jours où je me réveille avec cette idée-là, et jusqu'au soir je marche de long en large dans ma chambre avec le sentiment - non! - la

¹
Ibid., p. 760.

²
Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1136.

certitude - vous entendez? - la certitude d'une solitude si affreuse que je délibère sérieusement de devenir moine ou poète. Car tous ces types sont vieux, n'importe leur âge. Et nous aussi, Mainville, nous le sommes peut-être?...¹

With his hunger for the absolute, Philippe is as deeply committed in a Christian sense as any of the other adolescents of Bernanos. His profound disillusionment in Communism and the revolution it promised² indicates his hope that this political philosophy could somehow fill the spiritual emptiness of his life by spreading the seed of comradeship, of fraternity throughout mankind. In this belief, he no doubt mirrors the hopes of others like him.

Rejected by loved ones and by society, adolescents find themselves entirely alone. This isolation provokes desperate acts and finally disillusion. For example, Germaine's abandonment encouraged her to take a lover, partly to break her loneliness. When she accidentally kills him, she is impelled to find a second lover to overcome her unbearable loneliness.³

The terror of André's solitary existence prompts him to extract from his idol the promise of fidelity: "Je l'ai supplié de me garder, de m'emmener avec lui, n'importe où."⁴ Reproaching Evangéline later on, he indicates the root cause of his disillusionment as being the abject fear of abandonment:

¹ Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 888.

² Ibid., p. 891.

³ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 94.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 810.

Je sais que vous êtes un menteur. Oui,
 continua-t-il d'une voix discordante,
 j'ai fait pour vous tout ce que j'ai
 pu, vous m'aviez promis de ne pas
 m'abandonner et...¹

Chantal also struggles desperately against her alienation. Her father, the Count, is the only person capable of ending her unhappiness. Because of his misconduct with the governess, Chantal finds herself ensnared like the others.

So profound is Philippe's sense of alienation that he cannot bear to go on living:

C'est tout à coup que l'idée m'est venue.
 Ce n'était même pas exactement l'idée
 de me tuer, c'était comme la certitude
 d'être déjà mort, le sentiment d'une
 solitude, d'une solitude si parfaite que
 vivre - vous comprenez: voir, entendre,
 respirer, vivre enfin - m'a paru brusque-
 ment une anomalie intolérable.²

Steeny falls into a similar category. He angrily seeks to confront his mother with her lies and imposture. When Miss tries to dissuade him by winning his sympathy for Michelle's "solitude", she is astonished at the lad's response: "Ici, Miss, c'est moi qui suis³ seul, vous le savez bien." In rebellion against their disillusionment and humiliation, adolescents often throw down the gauntlet to society. Ironically, they are pressured into compromising their high ideals since the hatred they feel towards their oppressors, is, in fact, a revolt against Heaven. They end by accepting the values of the

¹
Ibid., p. 875.

²
 Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 953.

³
 Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1443.

imbecilic system with which they are at war. Germaine cannot resist the temptation of revolt. She deserts her home and parents seeking the companionship of Cadignan. To salvage her pride and overcome her humiliation at her lover's refusal to keep her, she resorts to lying and imposture.¹ She taunts her marquis into thinking that she never was pregnant ~~for~~ ^{by} him and pretends that she has made a fool of him by naming an imaginary lover.² With her second lover, she eagerly plumbs the depths of degradation.

André too finds himself in the unenviable position of condoning the immorality of the society he detests. Although he learns that his idol is an impostor, he does not withdraw his unconditional devotion. He is still eager to follow Evangéline anywhere, in order to stave off his detestable loneliness. He will eventually realize that he has inadvertently contaminated his innocence by lending himself to the imposture practised by his hero.

Chantal's principles are gradually undermined by "la force du mal, du péché, qui n'était pas le sien..."³ Her profound despair awakens the spirit of revolt within her. To avenge herself on her father and on society, she decides on the corruption of her moral and spiritual essence by debauchery and warns the curé of Ambricourt of her determination to humiliate her father:

Mais je me vengerai. Je me sauverai à
Paris, je me déshonorerai, je lui écrirai:

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 89.

² Ibid., p. 89.

³ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1138.

"Voilà ce que vous avez fait de moi!"
Et il souffrira ce que j'ai souffert!¹

The disappointments of life impel Steeny into a state of spiritual revolt. It is precisely because of his mother's indifference that he accepts Jambe-de-Laine's questionable offer to accompany her back to her chateau. The same motive induces him to drink too much Madeira so that he can spend the night in Monsieur Ouine's bedroom. Determined to lose his innocence, at war with himself, he will state his intention to enter into the duplicity demanded by the older generation.² His final decision against undertaking the spiritual pilgrimage visualized in "La belle route! La chère route!... La grande chance, la chance suprême, la chance unique de sa vie",³ ... seems to indicate that his earlier idealism has been eradicated by the foul and vicious world he inhabits. He resigns himself to accepting the anguish that life at home involves:

Maintenant, il y rentrerait sans regret,
il y vivrait même, passager toujours
prêt au départ, maître de son secret, sûr
de sa solitude.⁴

Olivier Mainville is weak and unable to bear his disillusionment alone. He follows the example of his hero and bows to the polluted system he abhors. He soon becomes adept at lying and dissimulation.⁵ Later, he takes to using alcohol and finally drugs.⁶

¹
Ibid., p. 1136.

²
Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1372.

³
Ibid., p. 1408.

⁴
Ibid., pp. 1418-1419.

⁵
Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 900.

⁶
Ibid., p. 900.

The compromise costs him his innocence and leads to the gradual disappearance of his Christian faith.¹ Olivier's situation is typical of adolescents. Having lost his faith through corruption, his contact with God is broken. His relationship with evil has destroyed his capacity for love and this is why, as Simone Alfieri points out, he is "hors de ce monde".² Like so many characters, the rebellious youth will learn that he can neither love himself nor others: "Je ne m'aime plus. Je ne peux pas vivre sans m'aimer".³ The self-disgust that settles down upon him provokes the deep distress and despair that Bernanos' adolescents experience:

Les larmes ruisselèrent aussitôt sur ses joues et l'affreuse détresse de ses yeux, de sa bouche, de son front même couvert de rides tout à coup, était de celles qui déconcertent la pitié, provoquent une crainte obscure, un obscur dégoût.⁴

The misery of Steeny is so great that Mme Marchal is able to read in his features the sadness that torments him:

Les creux d'ombre de ses joues s'élargissaient à mesure et la vieille femme, à sa grande surprise, voyait monter dans le regard d'enfant une lumière trouble, pareille à celle des matins d'automne, d'une inexplicable tristesse.⁵

In speaking of the distress inscribed on the features of her priest, Séraphita Dumouchel is led to remark upon her own sadness

¹ Ibid., p. 902.

² Ibid., p. 964.

³ Ibid., p. 966.

⁴ Ibid., p. 966.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1534.

at the thought of her sinful nature:

Moi aussi, je suis triste. C'est bon
d'être triste. Cela rachète les péchés,
que je me dis, des fois... - Tu fais donc
beaucoup de péchés ... - Tu n'as pas honte?
- Si, j'ai honte.¹

The sinner's experience of sadness and shame are common symptoms of their lack of solidarity, for Bernanos himself points out in La Joie² that "avec Satan, la tristesse est entrée dans le monde". The writer permits Chantal to stress still further the relationship between human misery and the feeling of alienation:

Avez-vous remarqué combien nous sommes,
combien les hommes surtout sont tristes,
dès qu'ils se taisent, dès qu'ils sont
seuls?³

Seen in this perspective, the distress of Bernanos' adolescents reveal their feelings of segregation in their community as well as their estrangement from God.

However, although their idealism is gravely undermined, youth will seldom accept passively the loss of their innocence. Conscious of their contamination they will be provoked into rebellion against themselves. It is an attitude that frequently ends in suicide. For example, in her disappointment with life, Germaine gives herself to Satan.⁴ When she meets the saint de Lumbres, he will recognize that she is a tormented soul.⁵ Although he tries desperately, he

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, pp. 1206-1207.

² Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 594.

³ Ibid., p. 550.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 213.

⁵ Ibid., p. 199.

does not prevent her from destroying herself. André's leavetaking is prompted by the same motives. Rather than face the torment that awaits him and continue living in the shameful knowledge of his corruption, he will simply destroy himself.¹ Chantal too is disillusioned with life and pretends that she will dishonour herself in Paris. Her priest is able to penetrate her mask of deception and discern the real truth. The misery of her exile, the corruption of her purity, impel her towards the temptation of suicide.²

Olivier Mainville is likewise disconsolate. He is disgusted by the realization that so many youth like himself "se travaillent pour désobéir aux commandements de Dieu. D'un Dieu auquel ils ne croient plus."³ He is conscious that the self-hatred that he and his generation share is born of their wholesale disregard for Christian values.⁴ He is convinced that their suffering is a direct consequence of their lack of faith. Ashamed, haunted by the temptation of suicide, he lacks the courage to destroy himself. He explains that his habit of self-humiliation is a moral form of suicide.⁵

Although some adolescents are overwhelmed by the victimization of adults and surrender their innocence and idealism, others like Philippe struggle desperately before finally relinquishing their lofty standards. It is the dishonourable times in which he lives that conspire to destroy his ardent desire to become a hero or a saint:

¹ Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 871.

² Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1152.

³ Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, pp. 968-969.

⁴ Ibid., p. 969.

⁵ Ibid., p. 967.

J'ignorerais toujours si, en d'autres
 temps, j'eusse été un héros ou un saint.
 Je déclare simplement que celui où j'ai
 la disgrâce de vivre ne me fournit pas
 la moindre occasion de tenter l'expérience
 avec la plus petite chance de succès.¹

The fact that Philippe seriously considers undertaking the self-
 sacrificial role of monk or poet² is evidence of his sincere desire
 to find a spiritual solution for his critical problem. Yet he is
 unsuccessful. The disillusioned youth will finally kill himself
 rather than continue living in debt either to the single "imbécile"
 Ganse or to the whole imbecilic society that the latter symbolizes.

Séraphita too experiences a similar yearning for purity
 and her life may be seen as a constant struggle to attain it. She
 confesses to her pastor the wrong she has done and reveals, by her
 suggested punishment of a flogging, the obsession she has with her own
 corruption:

Ma foi, non, j'ai raconté du mal de
 vous, des horreurs. Vous devriez me
 battre. Je suis jalouse, horriblement
 jalouse, jalouse comme une bête.³

This preoccupation is again revealed when she expresses her belief that
 she is evil: "Je ne suis pas bavarde, je suis méchante. - Sûr? - Sûr
 comme Dieu me voit!"⁴ Yet we know that Séraphita has an inner craving
 to improve her tainted nature. For example, she confesses that after
 the sexual games she plays with her wild village companions, she longs⁵
 for the punishment of death. She also admits that the limp which she

¹
Ibid., p. 954.

²
Ibid., p. 888.

³
 Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1200.

⁴
Ibid., p. 1206.

⁵
Ibid., p. 1207.

has suddenly developed is caused by a string with which she has tightly bound her leg. It is another self-imposed punishment for her wickedness.¹ Further, she explains to her pastor that the sadness of her features is a sort of saving grace since it indicates the sinner's sincere desire to atone for his sins.²

Although Séraphita disturbs and humiliates the curé of Ambricourt as a member of his catechism class,³ the young priest doesn't condemn her. He seems to think she is unable to withstand the temptation of lust that Satan places before adolescents like her.⁴ He also believes that the impurity of the young is usually caused by their disappointment with life.⁵

Séraphita's relentless pursuit of the priest is somewhat equivocal in nature. Although she victimizes him before her mother and her village companions, yet, when the ailing priest faints on his rounds of the Galbat district and is suffering from lightheadedness and nausea, it is Séraphita who finds him and ministers to his needs. On the one hand she is attracted by the mysterious purity that the priest incarnates. On the other, she is repelled by the knowledge of her own evil nature. Bernanos does not consider her impure for his country priest recognizes in a vision the seal of purity on her brow.⁶

¹
Ibid., p. 1207.

²
Ibid., p. 1206.

³
Ibid., p. 1107.

⁴
Ibid., p. 1107.

⁵
Ibid., p. 1106.

⁶
Ibid., p. 1200.

As we deliberate upon the conduct of Séraphita, we discern in her the dilemma of the Christian soul tortured by carnal desire yet animated by the urge for purity. Without guidance in this conflict she is left with no alternative but to keep her own counsel. Yet after each sinful action that she commits, she resorts to rudimentary remedies in her childish but deep desire for atonement and for God's love and mercy. Her repeated attempts to expiate her wrong-doing reveal her yearning for innocence and her enduring love for God.

Yet Séraphita seems earmarked for tragedy unless her headlong flight to destruction can be checked by the charity of her priest. Until her meeting with this remarkable man of God, Séraphita, like so many of Bernanos' characters, only knows the loneliness of "solitude".

It is a commonplace of Bernanosian literature to note that all those who are afflicted with the torment of "solitude" struggle desperately to escape its suffering. In consequence, numerous means of escape are sought and employed to deaden the immobilizing pain of separation. As with the "imbéciles", the remedies of the "enfants humiliés" all prove fruitless, for the suffering remains and often grows in intensity. The means of attaining paradise by artificial methods are totally ineffective. Bernanos' adolescents never realize, or do so perhaps in flashes, that the only real and lasting escape from "solitude" is through the love of God.

As we retrace the fortunes of the young we notice that all seek out a hero whose presence will soothe their pain and whose example they are eager to follow. Their adventure is in fact a spiritual quest

for the absolute since their yearning for devotion is an unmistakable indication of their misplaced hunger for love of a more profound, a more permanent nature, love of God. This viewpoint is corroborated by the statement of Simone Alfieri who describes for Ganse the crisis that is taking place between youth and age, two generations that are constantly at war with each other. She explains the catastrophe of adolescents like Olivier and Philippe and reveals the reason for their profound disillusionment:

Vous jugez Mainville sans le comprendre.
Et il ne faudrait pas seulement le
comprendre, il faudrait l'aimer. Mais
jamais deux générations ne se seront épiées
avec plus de haine sournoise, des deux
côtés de ce trou noir d'où monte encore
après tant d'années l'odeur des millions
de cadavres ... Pauvres gosses! S'ils
sont venus au monde avec cette grimace
dégoûtée qui vous déplaît si fort, c'est
que le monde sentait mauvais!... Mon Dieu,
ce qui leur a manqué sans doute, c'est
l'homme de génie qui eût parlé en leur
nom, les eût justifiés en vous accusant--
et ils l'attendront toujours...¹

Unleashed upon the young, the hostility of society humiliates them, incites them to anger and provokes their hatred. The conflict between generations then, contributes to the alienation of both so that "solitude" appears as the fundamental condition of the unregenerate fallen creature, man.

Youth is disillusioned and alienated because the people whom they love and trust act in a cowardly and contemptible manner.

¹

Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 928.

They refuse to take supernatural risks, to make any form of self-sacrifice and therefore to teach by example. The devotion of the young is stifled and converted into a consuming hatred for others and for themselves. This state of hostility signifies a rejection of God and brings with it the profound misery that all the sinners of Bernanos experience.

We might be tempted to believe that the Church is guilty of not ministering to the needs of adolescents who find themselves left entirely to their own devices and whose constant companion is loneliness. This is especially true when we consider that the victimization of the young appears to be preordained in many instances. For example, in dealing with Germaine's tragedy, Bernanos observes, "les événements qui vont suivre étaient déjà comme écrits en elle"¹. Evangéline will tell André: "Nous sommes destinés à travailler ensemble, mon enfant. "Destinés", comprenez-vous?"² In exactly the same way, the seal of destiny marks the life of Mouchette and all others who destroy themselves, for Bernanos believes that "le noir abîme n'accueille que les prédestinés"³. If however the tragedy of adolescents is predestined by the Creator, Bernanos will not neglect to point out that such destinies fit into His divine plan of Redemption.

As we review the portraits that we have studied, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the characters themselves must be made to share some part of the responsibility for their aborted

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 83.

² Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 758.

³ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1344.

lives. Whatever else may have contributed to their tragedy, the fact remains that all without exception, have placed their confidence in weak and misguided human beings, "Gods" with feet of clay. They seem to lack a penetrating vision. Perhaps their aspirations are short-sighted or they are merely devoid of inner resources. These shortcomings must be regarded as the root causes of their catastrophic lives.

It is indeed significant that the adolescents we have studied are all portrayed in rebellion against the adult world in which they live. It is equally revealing that this older generation with its spiritual sloth, passivity and cowardice, its attachment to material values and its refusal of spiritual risk, has succeeded in obliterating the adolescent values of "enfance". It is certainly not by chance that youth is condemned to exist in a world where love appears to be absent and where the burdens of pain and sadness seem to be the legitimate legacy of each individual. The message of the Christian writer, Georges Bernanos, comes across loud and clear in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne: it is only by the preservation of the adolescent thirst for the absolute, of the supernatural quality of "enfance", it is only through a Christian life that young and old alike will find the spiritual resources to stamp out from the heart of mankind, "le sentiment de sa solitude".¹

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1045.

CHAPTER IV

The movement away from God

The "solitude" of the sinners

The egomaniacs

The scourge of "solitude" is as typical of the "médiocres" we have studied as it is of the "enfants humiliés" that we have examined. We shall see whether it is equally characteristic of the egomaniacs who form our final assembly of Bernanos' lost souls.

In the author's artistic vision there are two principal roads leading to damnation:

Il y a deux façons de se damner,
il y a deux chemins de la perdition.
Le premier est d'aimer le mal plus que le bien, pour les satisfactions qu'il rapporte.
C'est le plus court. L'autre est de se préférer soi-même au bien et au mal, de rester indifférent à tous deux. C'est le chemin le plus long, c'est celui dont on ne revient pas.¹

While the "médiocres", "imbéciles" and "enfants humiliés" follow the first mentioned route, egomaniacs show a determination to travel the second. As the title we give them implies, they are driven by a passionate urge to establish their individuality. It is an appetite

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Chemin de la Croix-des-âmes, (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 37.

that Bernanos considers inherent in the nature of most human beings: "L'homme est né d'abord orgueilleux et l'amour-propre toujours béant est plus affamé que le ventre."¹ Believing themselves to be extraordinary, egomaniacs develop a desire to be totally independent. This disdain for subjection to God is pernicious because it rejects the Christian ethic of original sin: through the fault of Adam, fallen man can only be restored to perfection through his participation in the redemption by Christ. In the Christian's mind, man is clearly dependent on God for salvation as the curé of Torcy suggests in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne:

... le christianisme avait lâché dans le monde une vérité que rien n'arrêterait plus parce qu'elle était d'avance au plus profond des consciences et que l'homme s'était reconnu tout de suite en elle: Dieu a sauvé chacun de nous, et chacun de nous vaut le sang de Dieu.²

By examining the extent to which four principal characters from Bernanos' novels are vitiated by the sin of presumption and arrogantly seek to lead autonomous lives, we shall see how this vice brings about their spiritual degradation.

Abbé Cénabre, the central character of L'Imposture, is an abandoned orphan who has emerged from a background of poverty, alcoholism and criminal tendencies. The numerous harsh deprivations

¹
Georges Bernanos, Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune, p. 28.

²
Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1068.

of his early existence, the absence of love in particular, help to fashion a thoroughly self-centered nature in which pride is the dominant feature. Even as a youth he is already very much aware of "la supériorité de son intelligence,..."¹ We also note the author's comment that he is "rongé d'orgueil".² We learn later on that Cénabre is "ambitieux de s'élever, affamé de réputation,..." These twin passions, the author reminds us, shape his whole existence:

Dans cette âme entre toutes
prédestinée, l'orgueil et
l'ambition avaient établi
trop tôt leur empire, la
volonté inflexible
avait moins vaincu que re-
foulé, rejeté dans l'ombre,
les fantômes.³

The heroine of Un Crime is also a prey to pride and ambition. Not only is Evangéline's suffering described as "un vaste orgueil à l'agonie",⁴ but in his analysis of the motives for her conduct, the novelist insists upon her preoccupation with playing an extraordinary role:

L'obscur fierté d'avoir joué
jusqu'au bout, de jouer au-
delà de la mort, un rôle extra-
ordinaire, fait à sa mesure, à
la mesure de sa puissance de
dissimulation et de mensonge,
l'emportait sur tout autre
sentiment.⁵

Simone Alfieri of Un Mauvais Rêve is startlingly similar to the false curé of Mégère. From youth she is conscious of her

¹ Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 365.

² Ibid., p. 463.

³ Ibid., p. 463.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 865.

⁵ Ibid., p. 870.

superiority which is the principal feature of her personality since it is her belief that she was born "hors la loi, hors de toutes les lois,..."¹ Ganse, her employer, considers the widow a striking individual, "une espèce de sainte - oh! sans miracles, naturellement! - une sainte triste"². He is perceptive enough however to reveal one flaw in her saintliness:

Vous vous perdrez par orgueil, continua-t-il. Vous avez un orgueil de démon. Parlez-moi de diables tranquilles, de braves types de diables, des diables pourceaux. A vous, ma petite, il vous faut le serpent.³

Convinced of her superiority, Simone spends a considerable part of her life attempting to chart a grand destiny for herself. She is not beneath using the language of the supreme artist:

Hé bien! j'ai perdu l'espoir de donner à ma pauvre vie un commencement, un milieu et une fin, comme à un livre...⁴

Monsieur Ouine falls into a similar category. Reviewing his life, he admits: "Il n'y a eu en moi ni bien ni mal, aucune contradiction"⁵. He has never decided in favour of either Good or Evil, the two possible alternatives offered by the spiritual life. Having refused to become involved in the supernatural struggle through indifference, having placed his own desires before all other spiritual values, Monsieur Ouine is guilty of the sin of egotism. He has opted

¹ Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 1010.

² Ibid., p. 910.

³ Ibid., p. 922.

⁴ Ibid., p. 922.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1557.

in favour of damnation since he has made the lucid choice "de se préférer soi-même au bien et au mal, de rester indifférent à tous deux".¹

In order to project and enhance the image of their superiority, egomaniacs are fired with ambition to win praise and recognition from the world in which they live. Since however, they overestimate their singularity, the goals that they set themselves are frequently well beyond the range of their capability. These misguided creatures are prompted to undertake vainglorious acts that often involve a kind of rivalry with God. Ouine's confession to Steeny describing his treatment of Jambe-de-Laine and Anthelme, amply illustrates his aspiration to assume the role of Providence:

Je les regardais jouir et souffrir
ainsi que Celui qui les a créées
eût pu les regarder lui-même, ... je
me sentais leur providence, une
providence, presque aussi inviolable
dans ses desseins, aussi insoupçonnable
que l'autre... Avec quelle jubilation
j'entrais dans ces modestes consciences,
si peu différentes d'aspect, si com-
munes... ces âmes pareilles aux corons
des cités minières.... Je jouais de
cette sécurité grossière comme d'un
instrument délicat, j'en tirais une
harmonie particulière, d'une suavité
surhumaine, je me donnais ce passe-
temps de Dieu, car ce sont bien là les
amusements d'un Dieu, ses longs loisirs...
Voilà ce que je fis de Néréis, ce pauvre
enfant malchanceux. Voilà ce que je fis
de Jambe-de-Laine, dans cette vieille
maison qui devra conserver ma mémoire,
dont chaque pierre s'est imprégné de mon
plaisir.²

1

Georges Bernanos, Les Chemins de la croix-des-âmes, p. 37.

2

Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, pp. 1558-1559.

Like others who place themselves above the law, the false curé of Mègère behaves in similar fashion. By murdering Mme Beauchamp and deciding that the old woman's inheritance should pass to her niece, Evangéline seeks to display her superiority in order to elevate her status. She gives herself the airs of a Creator whose privilege it is to decide the destiny of other human beings.

Simone is also driven to criminal action. She sets herself up as an arbiter of the fate of two fellow human beings. Her motives appear to be charitable. By murdering Olivier's aunt, she will provide Ganse with an ending for his novel, Evangéline, which she has inspired but which the exhausted man of letters cannot terminate. Simone's crime will also furnish her lover with his aunt's legacy so that he can overcome his impoverished circumstances. However, Bernanos tells us that any charitable motives attributed to her act are utterly false.¹ He clearly defines her desires to rise above the level of those around her:

Une femme telle qu'Evangéline ne
tue pas selon les règles. Elle
tuera comme elle a tué jadis,
par besoin de se confirmer dans
l'idée qu'elle s'est faite d'elle-
même. Elle tue pour se mettre²
d'un coup hors la loi.

Mme Alfieri gives herself the power of life and death to minister to her tremendous ego.

This constant attempt at asserting their supremacy, with its continual rejection of the teachings of Christianity, indicates

¹

Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 1020.

²

Ibid., p. 925.

the dissatisfaction of egomaniacs with reality. They are unwilling to come face to face with Truth. Because of their arrogance, they develop an urge to escape into a world of illusion. Logically then, pride impels them into the practice of lying and hypocrisy. Abbé Cénabre, for example, has always led a life of imposture: "La vie de l'abbé Cénabre a aussi sa clef: une hypocrisie presque absolue"¹. The priest's predilection for dissimulation is traced to his earlier childhood: "le petit paysan, rongé d'orgueil, jouait presque innocemment, d'instinct, au foyer familial, la lugubre comédie de la vocation"². Spurred by pride, he develops the art of deception to its extreme consequences with alarming results:

Le goût, l'ardeur, la frénésie
du mensonge, et son exercice
perpétuel, aboutissant à un
véritable dédoublement, à un
dédoublement véritablement
monstrueux, de l'être.³

We witness a similar condition of "dédoublement" in the personality of Evangéline when she discovers that the practice of lying obliges the impostor to accept the role of the false "persona" he has created:

L'être vulgaire ne se connaît lui-même qu'à travers le jugement d'autrui, c'est autrui qui lui donne son nom, ce nom sous lequel il vit et meurt, comme un navire sous un pavillon étranger.⁴

¹ Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 362.

² Ibid., p. 362.

³ Ibid., p. 362.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 860.

Simone is also afflicted by a dualism in her nature through her passion for duplicity:

Mais elle était de celles, moins rares qu'on ne pense, qui aiment le mensonge pour lui-même, en usent avec une prudence et une clairvoyance profondes, et d'ailleurs ne l'apprécient que lorsque le vrai et le faux s'y mêlent si étroitement qu'ils ne font qu'un, vivent de leur vie propre, font dans la vie une autre vie.¹

Monsieur Ouine feels as though he possesses two souls² and recognizes a similar self-contradiction in his inner life. By presenting for us the mysterious phenomenon of "dédoublement", Bernanos is in fact portraying the manner in which falsehood destroys the inner life of egomaniacs. It is their mark of desertion by God. Bernanos makes this observation in La Liberté pour quoi faire? while discussing the theme of "mensonge" in its relationship with dualism:

Dieu s'en va, Dieu se retire de nous, comme il nous laisse à la fois vides et lourds!... Cette liberté intérieure qui était notre privilège héréditaire, ... cette liberté intérieure, c'était Lui: nous l'avons perdue, c'est Dieu que nous avons perdu avec elle,...

Because of their pride, egomaniacs become impostors and corrupt the fundamental truth of their divine nature. Alienated from

¹ Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 989.

² Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1547.

³ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, pp. 186-187.

God these creatures are invaded by Satan. They are therefore typified by the abject hatred issuing from hell:

Il y a dans l'homme une haine secrète incompréhensible, non seulement de ses semblables, mais de lui-même... Pour nous, chrétiens, nous croyons que cette haine reflète une autre haine, mille fois plus profonde et plus lucide - celle de l'Esprit indicible qui fut le plus rayonnant des astres de l'abîme, et qui ne nous pardonnera jamais sa chute immense.¹

The enmity of the arrogant is manifested by the singular form of curiosity that motivates them. Abbé Cénabre develops a craving for knowledge that is entirely divorced from a love of his subject. His attraction to the miracle of sanctity is a challenge to his intelligence, it poses a problem that he intends to solve analytically.² He is not interested in gaining the knowledge of his subject that might increase man's understanding and therefore his love for God. His task is undertaken as a sterile exercise in intellectual curiosity for the purpose of winning personal glory. The author's description of its results is significant: "les livres brillants et stériles, au coeur empoisonné, modèles d'analyse perfide, sagace, impitoyable,...³ This pitiless curiosity mingled with pride is at the basis of Cénabre's loss of faith:

Car lentement désagrégée par la délectation du doute volontaire, par le sacrilège d'une curiosité

1

Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 252.

2

Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 366.

3

Ibid., p. 366.

sans amour, la croyance s'était évanouie, totalement comme une fonction qui ne survivrait pas à l'organe détruit, dont il ne subsisterait même pas le besoin.¹

Without charity, the pastor becomes devoid of love for God.² He is revolted at the very thought of "la Passion de Notre-Seigneur".³ He therefore writes about the saints as though the order of charity were non-existent.⁴ His spiritual brother, abbé Chevance, points out that he is possessed by the cold fury of Satan:

Ah! monsieur le chanoine, dans le blasphème, il y a quelque amour de Dieu, mais l'enfer que vous habitez est le plus froid.⁵

Mme Alfieri is also guilty of curiosity and the failing drains her of Christian faith. Since her religious fervour is imaginary, she naturally feels an aversion for all those who love God. Her curiosity is merely a symptom of the flood of hatred that consumes her. Her confession to Olivier Mainville, her lover, reveals the extent to which she is a prisoner of hell: "Hé bien! sache-le: je n'ai jamais aimé personne d'amour".⁶ It is certainly Monsieur Ouine who best illustrates the devouring curiosity of Satan:

La curiosité me dévore, poursuit M. Ouine. A ce moment elle creuse et ronge le peu qui me reste. Telle est ma faim. Que n'ai-je été curieux des choses! Mais je n'ai eu faim que des âmes.⁷

¹ Ibid., p. 334.

² Ibid., p. 355.

³ Ibid., p. 364.

⁴ Ibid., p. 329.

⁵ Ibid., p. 365.

⁶ Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 365.

⁷ Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, pp. 1557-1558.

This desire to ferret out the innermost secret vices that condemn so many souls to torment is dictated by the base desire to gain an infernal dominion over them. Devoid of compassion, Ouine's curiosity merely masks the contempt he feels towards his victims:

... aucune possession de l'amour ne peut être comparée à cette prise infaillible, qui n'offense pas le patient, le laisse intact et pourtant à notre entière merci, prisonnier mais gardant ses nuances les plus délicates, toutes les irisations, toutes les diapures de la vie. Telles étaient ces âmes.¹

Yet the resentment that the great sinners harbour for others reflects the hatred they feel for themselves and this privation of love testifies to the torment of their inner lives.

So great is Cénabre's self-hatred, even as a young man in the seminary, that his tutor remarks: "Je crois qu'il n'aime pas, disait-il. IL NE S'AIME MEME PAS..."² His contempt will grow until he makes an attempt on his life. Bernanos describes the anguish of his imprisonment and reinforces it with the image of an enchanted circle from which there is no escape:

Mais au fond du coeur sa déception était plus forte encore du silence qu'il ne pouvait rompre, de la solitude incompréhensible où depuis quelques heures il était tombé. Prières, menaces, mensonges, cris de fureur ou de désespoir, il semblait que rien ne pût dépasser le cercle enchanté. Il était comme un homme qui crie au bord de la mer.³

¹
Ibid., p. 1559.

²
Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 363.

³
Ibid., p. 346.

The wretched priest is filled with a deep-seated need for the solidarity of communion with others and this need becomes especially urgent whenever he meets a happy throng of people:

Jamais il ne sentait mieux
qu'alors sa solitude, jamais
il ne souhaitait plus ardem-
ment d'y échapper, de rompre
le cercle enchanté à n'importe
quel prix, de se rendre à
discrétion, corps et âme....
Il avait envie de crier à
ces gens heureux, ou qu'il
croyait naïvement tels:
"Recevez-moi! Délivrez-moi!
ou du moins insultez-moi..."¹

Only after she commits the crime of murder is it evident that Simone has always been her own enemy:

Contre la ridicule victime étendue à ses
pieds, elle n'avait réellement senti aucune
haine. La seule haine qu'elle eût
vraiment connue, éprouvée, consommée
jusqu'à la lie, c'était la haine de soi....
Elle s'était haïe dès l'enfance,...²

Yet her criminal act, like her imposture, are attempts to escape from the silence and "solitude" that have become the secret malediction of her life:

...la malédiction de ma vie,
c'aura été justement de ne
pouvoir venir à bout de rien!
Solitude et silence, silence
et solitude, je ne serai jamais³
sortie de ce cercle enchanté...

Through her choice of a masquerade existence, the false curé of Mégère becomes so filled with loathing for herself that she

¹
Ibid., p. 464.

²
Georges Bernanos, Un Mauvais Rêve, p. 1020.

³
Ibid., p. 919.

finally commits suicide. Before dying, Evangéline reveals in a letter to her former companion, the "solitude" she was forced to endure:

Nous étions seules, tout à fait seules, d'une solitude miraculeuse que nous aurions inutilement cherchée à des milliers de lieues au-delà des mers. Car jour et nuit veillait à notre porte la plus vigilante et la plus sûre des sentinelles: cette fausse image que le monde se formait de nous...¹

Monsieur Ouine is the personification of hell, Jambe-de-Laine explains to Philippe, when he accuses her of loving the former language professor:

Dieu! l'aimer! Mais, mon ange, quiconque l'approche n'a justement plus besoin d'aimer, quelle paix, quel silence! L'aimer? Je vais vous dire, mon coeur: comme d'autres rayonnent, échauffent, notre ami absorbe tout rayonnement, toute chaleur. Le génie de M. Ouine, voyez-vous, c'est le froid! Dans ce froid l'âme repose.²

Since hell for Bernanos is the inability to love,³ the hatred of the great sinners projects their divorce from Heaven. Presumptuous beings, Bernanos' egomaniacs are incapable of learning the valuable lesson that the dying curé of Ambricourt passes on: true grace is to forget oneself which is only possible if pride were dead in each of us.⁴

¹ Georges Bernanos, Un Crime, p. 863.

² Georges Bernanos, Monsieur Ouine, p. 1423.

³ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1157.

⁴ Ibid.

It is difficult to ignore the similarities that exist between "médiocres" and egomaniacs. Since both tell lies, practice imposture, are consumed by hatred and poisoned by "solitude", it appears unacceptable to make a case for dividing them into separate categories. However, once the above points of comparison are admitted, the resemblance ceases. Bernanos' egomaniacs distinguish themselves from all other characters. For example, the "médiocres" are characterized by an attitude of passive resistance and their most frequent reaction to the world in which they live is one of withdrawal. They refuse to opt in favour of Christian values, neglect to develop an inner life, turn away from the prospect of greatness by avoiding supernatural risk and withhold their devotion and assistance from those in need. Aware of their many shortcomings, they are frequently satisfied with success in obscurity since their renown is usually illusory. Above all, the withdrawal of God from their lives is not accompanied by any apparent difference in their lifestyle. They remain a docile breed, existing in a state of agonized limbo.

Egomaniacs are passionate creatures who act impulsively since their personality is completely dominated by the passion of pride. The "solitude" that captivates them precipitates violent changes in their conduct. It shatters the sanity of Cénabre and incites Monsieur Ouine, Evangéline and Simone to outrageously criminal action. Constantly at war with themselves, egomaniacs display frenetic energy in their undertakings. Abbé Cénabre, for example, abruptly attacks Pernichon.¹ He violently dismisses him² then suddenly shatters the

¹ Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 322.

² Ibid., p. 321.

lamp shining on the crucifix. He pushes abbé Chevance to the floor,¹ delights in the degradation of an old beggar³ and abruptly tries to blow out his brains.⁴

Evangéline murders Mme Beauchamp, kills the priest who surprises her, is instinctively drawn to André Gaspard, then drives him to suicide,⁵ and finally destroys herself.⁶

Monsieur Ouine dominates and corrupts all who come into contact with him. We believe he seduces Steeny, causes the death of Anthelme and Old Florent, murders the little cowherd, and attempts to drive the curé of Fenouille to despair. After a life of degradation he suddenly bemoans his "solitude" and pleads for salvation. The egomaniacs act with unrestrained power that will not be subdued. Their attitudes contrast violently with mediocre conduct.

Without a fermenting pride to spur them on, the "médiocres" never wilfully commit crimes, attempt to reign supreme over others or conceive the idea of rivaling Heaven. Their lies, hypocrisy and even their hatreds lack the intensity belonging to egomaniacs. It is as though this arrogant race are so disturbed by the emptiness of their spiritual lives that they hurl themselves into the abyss with a total commitment to evil. Their revolt is perhaps a last desperate effort which serves to indicate their disillusionment at not having found God.

¹
Ibid., p. 324.

²
Ibid., p. 346.

³
Ibid., pp. 451-480.

⁴
Ibid., p. 372.

⁵
Ibid., p. 871.

⁶
Ibid., p. 871.

It becomes evident from our study that pride confines egomaniacs in a spiritual seclusion that is typical of "imbéciles", "médiocres" and "enfants humiliés". Even more evident is the fact that Bernanos' sinners are all counter-balanced against his "saints". They seem to have been portrayed for the express purpose of throwing into relief the true spirit of Christianity that the "saints" incarnate. Possessing neither Christian faith nor divine love, the sinners remain etched on the mind of the reader by virtue of their profound suffering. Further, the writer takes special care to make the tragic destiny of his characters remain rooted in the consciousness of his reader. He is doubtless urging mankind to strengthen its faith or run the risk of experiencing the same tragic "solitude". Since they channel our thoughts and direct our vision to the heroic spiritual adventure of sanctity, the sinners of Bernanos are, in one sense, as significant as his "saints".

Yet the Bernanosian joy possessed by the faithful will remain unknown to sinners. As the curé of Torcy testifies, those who live outside the Church, refuse to follow its teachings, will one day experience the truth of Satan's words: "Je suis la porte à ¹ jamais close, la route sans issue, le mensonge et la perdition".

The message of Georges Bernanos the writer reflects a vital aspect of Georges Bernanos the man. The vision that emerges is one of a human being who is deeply devoted to his fellows and extremely compassionate towards their suffering. Above all, the delineation of character by the writer testifies to the profound Christian convictions that he holds.

¹
Ibid., p. 1046.

CHAPTER V

The movement towards God

A preoccupation with union and communion

The Church: a vision of solidarity

After a study and an analysis of the work of Georges Bernanos it is impossible to overlook the fact that by far the greatest part of the author's writing is dedicated to portraying a detailed, panoramic vision of the world of sin that his personages inhabit. Not only does the corrupting influence of evil reappear constantly to overwhelm the characters and shock them into a state of submission and despair, but the degraded creatures are invaded by contempt for themselves and others, develop an aversion for God and are eventually abandoned to the pain of Bernanosian "solitude". Further, the presence of death and destruction makes itself felt throughout the author's fiction as a rage of suicides and disease takes a heavy toll of sinners playing both major and minor roles. Even the "saints" are not exempt from the ravages of sin, injustice and disease. In Les Dialogues des Carmélites, with the sole exception of Mère Marie de l'Incarnation, all the Carmelite nuns who form the religious community are unjustly executed on the scaffold. Further, abbé Donissan, abbé Chevance, and the curé of Ambricourt all die from physical maladies. Chantal de Clergerie is murdered and Blanche de la Force, beheaded.

In fact, all the "saints"¹ of Bernanos experience a tragic death.

If therefore we were to concern ourselves exclusively with the spectacle of man's corruption, his consequent alienation and death

¹ For Bernanos, the saint is neither extraordinary, heroic nor sublime. He is a simple human being who has developed to his utmost capacity, those Christian virtues that each individual possesses in a certain measure, according to God's grace.

that emerges with such clarity in the universe of Bernanos, we would be obliged to conclude that the creator of this singular race of men was himself bowed down with the weight of sin, and having lost his faith, was alienated from God and the Creation without hope of recovery. Bernanos himself was very well aware that such a conclusion might easily be drawn from his work:

Je crains plutôt qu'on me prête
des intentions, qu'on me soup-
çonne de proclamer les décep-
tions vulgaires pour mieux
dissimuler, par pudeur, le secret
d'une déception fondamentale.¹

In order therefore that he should not be misunderstood, the writer does not hesitate to make a statement flatly rejecting the opinion that he is a prisoner of despair. Moreover, by stating that nothing could be further from the truth, he reaffirms for the reader his unswerving Christian faith:

Or, je ne suis pas déçu, rien
ne m'a déçu, au sens exact du
mot, la moindre déception réelle
m'eût réduit au silence, je le
jure. Il n'est de véritable décep-
tion que de ce qu'on aime, et je
n'aurais absolument pas la force
de supporter d'être déçu par ce
que j'aime. Ni la vie ni les
hommes ne m'ont déçu, ne me décevront
jamais.²

Yet it is not merely the constancy of faith that is reiterated and reinforced by the author of Nous Autres Français. He gives his readers the unmistakable impression that he possesses a vast reservoir of hope:

¹ Georges Bernanos, Les Enfants Humiliés, p. 193.

² Ibid., pp. 193-194.

J'appartiens probablement de
naissance à ce peuple de
l'attente, à la race qui ne
désespère jamais, pour laquelle
le désespoir est un mot vide de
sens, analogue à celui de néant.¹

Yet, these statements are not to suggest that Georges Bernanos was never visited by what he himself refers to as "the temptation of despair". In fact, we do know from his personal correspondence that he was often tempted. For example, in 1926, he wrote to a friend: "Je suis entre l'Ange lumineux et l'Ange obscur, et je les regarde tour à tour, avec la même famine enragée de l'absolu".² Yet only a few days before he died in 1948 and sensing that his death was imminent, he is reported to have become exasperated with his doctors and upbraided them for inventing medicines to keep him alive: "A quoi bon? vous m'épuisez... On ne tombe qu'en Dieu."³ The fact that he shows no fear of death and perhaps believes that it is a permanent rendezvous with God, is precisely because he has maintained steadfast faith until the very end of his life. If then we are to find the chief reasons that dictate the tendency of the writer to overemphasize the spectacle of a corrupt universe, we must look beyond the realm of pessimism or despair. On examining closely the short stories of Bernanos, his eight novels, the whole range of his polemical work and especially the final play that he wrote, we are obliged to acknowledge that all without exception betray the vision of

¹ Georges Bernanos, Nous Autres Français, p. 31.

² Lettre à Valléery-Radot, 17 janvier 1926, Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Georges Bernanos, No. 1, décembre 1949, p. 3.

³ Albert Béguin, Georges Bernanos, Essais et Témoignages, p. 347.

a Christian writer whose whole perspective is fixed between the confines of the Fall and the Redemption. In fact, the obsession of the writer with portraying the terrifying and pessimistic reality of man, severed from God, is counterbalanced by an equally powerful urge to communicate a crucial message:

Un chrétien ne peut pas désespérer
de l'homme... Ce que j'espère?
Une mobilisation générale et
universelle de toutes les forces
de l'esprit, dans le but de rendre
à l'homme la conscience de sa dignité.¹

Yet this hope that man can be restored to the state of perfection he enjoyed before the Fall is not merely an indication of the writer's unassailable faith. It is also a positive statement of his belief that mankind can rediscover "le Royaume perdu de la Joie".

Because of his devotion to a spiritual life, it is natural to infer that the motive force producing the thoughts and writing of Georges Bernanos, the main purpose that gives his work its thrust and direction, is generated by the need to accomplish his Christian mission of testifying to the truth as manifested in the Gospel. This is why he considers that his vocation as a writer, like that of a priest, is the response to a spiritual call. "Une vocation d'écrivain est souvent--ou plutôt parfois--l'autre aspect d'une vocation sacerdotale."² If therefore the writer constantly affirms that man is condemned to perish because he has been drained of his spiritual essence, if he

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 145.

² Albert Béguin, Bernanos par lui-même, p. 149.

constantly reemphasizes his belief that "L'humanité tout entière est malade",¹ these opinions ought never to be divorced from his equally compelling preoccupation with curing humanity of its spiritual ills; "C'est l'humanité qu'il faut guérir. Il faut d'abord et avant tout, respiritualiser l'homme".² Although this message offers proof of the enduring charity that the writer feels towards his Christian brothers, it clearly illustrates more than anything else, his determination to help lost creatures find their way back to God.

The idea of salvation through union and communion with God, fundamental to the concept of Christianity, is demonstrated in numerous ways. The author of Nous Autres Français uses direct statement to transmit his belief that all men will be saved:

Le simple catéchisme auquel il faut toujours revenir dès qu'on veut rentrer dans le bon sens, ... nous enseigne qu'un chrétien doit, n'importe où Dieu l'ait placé, "faire son salut". Faire son salut, se sauver. Il y aura toujours, hélas, un certain nombre de chrétiens pour donner à cette expression le sens de "sauve qui peut!" ... Mais un chrétien ne se sauve pas seul, il ne se sauve qu'en sauvant les autres.³

His ardour to constantly seek for the road to Paradise is unmistakable:

Il y a quelques semaines je parlais pour le Paraguay, ce Paraguay que notre dictionnaire Larousse, ... qualifie de Paradis Terrestre. Je n'ai pas trouvé là-bas le Paradis Terrestre, mais je sens bien que je n'ai pas fini de le chercher, que je le chercherai toujours, que je chercherai toujours cette route perdue, effacée de la mémoire des hommes.⁴

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 146.

² Ibid., p. 146.

³ Georges Bernanos, Nous Autres Français, p. 32.

⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

The compelling urge, generated by the Crucifixion of Christ in the hearts of the fallen creature, to rediscover the "route perdue" that leads to God's Kingdom, is also present in his fiction:

La société moderne peut bien renier son maître,
elle a été rachetée elle aussi, ... la voilà
partie comme nous tous, bon gré, mal gré, à
la recherche du royaume de Dieu.¹

Other polemical and fictional works lay still further stress on the writer's desire to affirm that Christ died to redeem the world from sin and to prepare the way for a glorious reunion for all men.

If therefore Georges Bernanos shows a predilection for writing in cafés and train carriages² in order to gaze constantly at the members of the public by whom he is surrounded, if he listens intently to their voices and dedicates his whole career as a writer to eradicate the scourge of mediocrity and imposture that separates men from each other and severs them from God, if above all, he seldom ceases to reiterate his Christian message of hope, it is because of his imperative desire to maintain a constant dialogue between himself, his fellow men and the Creator.

However, there is another reason why Bernanos accords special emphasis to the treatment of evil and corruption in his creative universe. It is certainly not by chance that almost all his writing portrays the same tragic vision of man as an alienated creature who has refused the love of God. Yet as we have seen, this predominance is not to be translated as an indication of his pessimism and despair.

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1067.

² Georges Bernanos, Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, p. III.

Another reason for the writer's major concern with this theme is because he uses it in his bold and imaginative method of juxtaposition. It becomes a backdrop that the artist uses to throw into prominence and thus illuminate his Christian message. By focusing our attention upon the awful human tragedy associated with the kingdom of disgrace, Bernanos is dramatically affirming humanity's vital need for the realm of grace. He is determined to show the reader that in a world devastated by hatred, the only possible solution is the unifying power of love. He will show that the Church, the Communion of Saints and the "saints" themselves, are three of the avenues taken for union with God.

Let us examine the writer's view of the Church as an instrument of reconciliation between the creature and the Creator.

The Church: a vision of solidarity

In the universe of Bernanos where corruption seems to predominate over virtue, the writer opposes the presence of Satan to the existence of the kingdom of God on this very earth as symbolized by the Church and all it represents.

It is impossible to read any single work of Bernanos in its entirety without being exposed to his views on some aspect of the Church. This illustrates his attachment to the Church and his dedication to Christianity as may be inferred from his statement in Nous Autres

Français:

Je ne vivrais pas cinq minutes hors de l'Eglise et si l'on m'en chassait, j'y rentrerais aussitôt pieds nus, en chemise, la corde au cou, enfin aux conditions qu'ils vous plairait de m'imposer, qu'importe!¹

1

Georges Bernanos, Nous Autres Français, p. 144.

By reviewing the author's opinions of the Church we will understand its essential role of reuniting man with God. We should recall that Bernanos was an orthodox Catholic. He therefore believed that Christ died to redeem man. As His extension on earth, the Church undertakes to re-christianize the world in order to save mankind. It achieves its objectives by preaching and teaching the virtues of its founder.

We should however realize that numerous men refuse to enter the Church and practice the Christian faith through ignorance of their divine origin, of the fact that they are made in the image of God and hence, possess the capacity for love.¹ Unable to use their divine gifts, they become alienated souls incapable of ascending the path to salvation. The Church plays a vital role in restoring man to the consciousness of his dignity:

A ce point de vue, (rendre à l'homme la conscience de sa dignité) l'Eglise a un rôle immense à jouer. Elle le jouera tôt ou tard, elle sera forcée de le jouer.²

When the author of Le Journal d'un curé de campagne describes the Church in the following terms, his words are directed to those whose ignorance withholds them from entering the Church and from finding the means of gaining salvation. Were they to visit the Church, they would learn:

L'Eglise a les nerfs solides, le péché ne lui fait pas peur, au contraire. Elle le regarde en face, tranquillement, et même, à l'exemple de Notre-Seigneur, elle le prend à son compte, elle l'assume.³

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 287.

² Ibid., p. 145.

³ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1044.

They would also recognize the Church's courage, in fixedly regarding sin and Satan, as admirable. Further, by assuming sin and purifying mankind, the Church would encourage man to remain within its protective influence. It would induce him to place his faith, his hope for salvation, in Christ. The Church certainly possesses the means of dissipating the boredom of even those luke-warm Christians who attend mass. Unfortunately, their boredom persists since they visit the Church for no longer than "une malheureuse demi-¹ heure par semaine,...

The writer notes that a race of Christians should be a gay, youthful group of people, filled with the joy of "enfance",² since being Christians, their happiness would be assured in this world and the next. Unfortunately he adds, modern man is quite the opposite, "un peuple triste, un peuple de vieux."³ When we recall Bernanos' words that "Avec Satan, la tristesse est entrée dans le monde..."⁴, we recognize his conviction that man's absence of joy derives directly from his neglect of the Church. This opinion is especially true when we consider the author's affirmation:

L'Eglise dispose de la joie, de toute la part de joie réservée à ce triste monde. Ce que vous avez fait contre elle, vous l'avez fait contre la joie.⁵

¹ Ibid., p. 1044.

² Ibid., p. 1044.

³ Ibid., p. 1044.

⁴ Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 594.

⁵ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1046.

This despair, typical of modern day man, would cease to occur if the Church were permitted to perform its appointed task: "Hé bien, l'Eglise a été chargée par le bon Dieu de maintenir dans le monde, cet esprit d'enfance, cette ingénuité, cette fraîcheur."¹ The importance of "enfance" cannot be over-emphasized for Bernanos, since it involves those Christian qualities of humility, confidence in God and total abandonment to His will that includes the spirit of self-sacrifice. All are therefore indispensable to the life of a Christian. In its duty to maintain "l'esprit d'enfance", the Church is empowered by God to generate His love throughout the world so that it comes within the reach of all men.

There are other Christian virtues, certainly as important as "enfance", that it is the Church's task of disseminating. This is not only accomplished within the Church, by preaching the example of Christ to the faithful, but also through His ministers by the virtuous lives they lead in the world. We will notice, in our study of individual "saints", the spirit of poverty of which the Church is the guardian.² There is also the virtue of simplicity and the habit of prayer, both associated with sanctity, since they involve different forms of devotion to God. These Christian virtues exemplified by the "saints" will be dealt with in the following chapter.

¹
Ibid., p. 1046.

²
Ibid., p. 1078.

The Church and clergy undertake other very important assignments of Christ: administering the sacraments, preaching the Gospel and bringing to the world "Les vérités de l'Évangile..."¹ The ministers of the Church also hear confession, celebrate mass, visit the sick, console the suffering, and where necessary, absolve the dying.

Separated from The Church of Christ, man becomes an alien soul, banished from the realm of absolute love. Bernanos conjures up the infernal destiny reserved for such creatures:

Hors l'Église, un peuple sera toujours un peuple de bâtards, un peuple d'enfants trouvés. Evidemment, il leur reste encore l'espoir de se faire reconnaître par Satan. Bernique! Ils peuvent l'attendre longtemps, leur petit Noël noir!²

In the Bernanosian universe where sinners seem to vie desperately with one another to expel God from their hearts, it is not sufficient to denounce the evils of modern civilization that cause the catastrophe. What is needed even more is a bulwark against such corruption. According to Bernanos, this can only be created by following the unique example that is solemnized by the Church itself: the vocation of sanctity.

In Jeanne, Relapse et Sainte, Georges Bernanos reiterates the vital importance he attached to the co-operation between the Church and the "saints" in his Christian vision: "Notre Église est l'église des saints."³ He places his "saints" at the very heart of

¹ Ibid., p. 1067.

² Ibid., p. 1045.

³ Georges Bernanos, Jeanne, Relapse et Sainte, p. 61.

the Church and their indivisible relationship is used as a divine instrument of reconciliation between man and his Maker.

For Bernanos, the "saints" are the army of the Church and their vocation is an undertaking of the one existing route that leads to the kingdom of hope:

Qui l'a une fois compris est entré au coeur
de la foi catholique, a senti tressaillir dans
sa chair mortelle une autre terreur que
celle de la mort, une espérance surhumaine.¹

The "saints" possess "le génie de l'amour".² They are thus capable of total involvement in preaching the gospel of love by example, of complete self-sacrifice in the struggle against evil. Bernanos testifies to this dedication to the winning of salvation for sinners: "Un saint...engage totalement son âme".³

Whoever approaches the Church with mistrust in his heart will believe that he sees only closed doors and barriers to his entry. To such a person the Church will no doubt appear in the guise of "une espèce de gendarmerie spirituelle".⁴ Yet, by insisting that "notre Eglise est l'église des saints",⁵ the writer makes us especially aware of the inestimable spiritual worth of the dedicated race of men who help perpetuate Christ's presence:

¹
Ibid., p. 62.

²
Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 287.

³
Ibid., p. 282.

⁴
Georges Bernanos, Jeanne, Relapse et sainte, p. 61.

⁵
Ibid., p. 61.

Pour être un saint, quel évêque ne donnerait son anneau, sa mitre, sa crosse, quel cardinal sa pourpre, quel pontife sa robe blanche, ses camériers, ses suisses et tout son temporel?¹

Although then, Bernanos envisages the Church as a vast train bound for Paradise,² yet the vital role of organizing and directing the movement of its passengers to their destination is placed firmly in the hands of the "saints".³

We notice too that the spiritual role of the Church is to bring to fruition the adventure of sanctity which for Bernanos is "la plus haute réalité que puisse connaître l'homme aidé de la grâce..."⁴ It is therefore not surprising that the "saints" play a series of major roles in the author's works. Without them and hence the Church, the writer believes that Christianity and mankind would suffer a major catastrophe:

Mais sans les saints, moi je vous le dis, la Chrétienté ne serait qu'un gigantesque amas de locomotives renversées, de wagons incendiés, de rails tordus et de ferrailles achevant de se rouiller sous la pluie.⁵

Through the Church, the business of the "saint" is to assure the world of its most precious quality, liberty.⁶ As Bernanos

¹
Ibid., p. 61.

²
Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 265.

³
Ibid., p. 266.

⁴
Georges Bernanos, Le Crépuscule des vieux, p. 68.

⁵
Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 266.

⁶
Ibid., p. 280.

points out in La Liberté pour quoi faire?, at that moment when Christians learn enough humility to accept their destiny without rancour or the spirit of rebellion, the mystery of the Creation occurs within them:¹ "Oui, au moment où... (ils) acceptaient leur destin, s'acceptaient eux-mêmes, humblement--le mystère de la Création s'accomplissait en eux,...² Through the charity of Christ,³ they become "saints".

If however Bernanos was devoted to "The Church of the Saints", he never blinded himself to the grave disorders that existed within its confines. He recognized that the visible Church is in part a vast administrative machine run by the ministers of God. Yet these ministers are men and hence, subject to vice, mediocrity and in fact, all sorts of corruption. For him, the Church is a family household with God as the Father and just as there is always disharmony in family life, so disorder exists within the Church:

L'Eglise est une maison de famille, une maison paternelle, et il y a toujours du désordre dans ces maisons-là, les chaises ont parfois un pied de moins, les tables sont tachées d'encre, et les pots de confitures se vident tout seuls dans les armoires, je connais ça, j'ai l'expérience...⁴

Although the writer denounces the Church militant for its shortcomings, he is really condemning those men within the Church, Pope or prelate, whose conduct has stained its honour and degraded its reputation in the eyes of the world. We have seen, for example, the hostile portraits he draws of priests like abbé Cénabre, and others

¹
Ibid., p. 281.

²
Ibid., p. 282.

³
Ibid., p. 283.

⁴
Ibid., p. 285.

like abbé Sabiroux or Mgr. Espelette. The imposture practiced by such ministers of the Church represents for Bernanos a scandalous departure from the essential truth inherent in their Christian vocation. The writer was equally shocked by the fact that any priest could be entirely devoid of simple Christian charity. His opinion of a Church lacking in charity appears in Jeanne, Relapse et Sainte:

Tout ce grand appareil de sagesse, de force, de souple discipline, de magnificence et de majesté n'est rien de lui-même, si la charité ne l'anime.¹

Dedicated to the conviction that "Aucun rite ne dispense d'aimer..."², Bernanos launched several attacks against the Spanish hierarchy of the Church at the time of the Civil War, for their uncharitable conduct towards others, in Les Grands cimetières sous la lune.

In Les Chemins de la Croix-des-âmes, he also castigates dignitaries of the Church for compromising its honour by struggling with one another in their intrigue for personal advancement. Further, he notes that such people no doubt see the Church as a kind of spiritual police force established for the defence of mores and propriety.³

We must bear constantly in mind that Bernanos' denunciation was aimed solely at the abuses practiced by the visible Church militant. No doubt for him, such outspoken presentations of truth fell under the heading of his Christian duty that could not be neglected. Yet, since his criticism was calculated to call attention to Church abuse, he was in fact rallying together men of good will so that such practices

¹ Georges Bernanos, Jeanne, Relapse et Sainte, p. 64.

² Ibid., p. 65.

³ Georges Bernanos, Les Chemins de la Croix-des-âmes, pp. 409-410.

would be rooted out. Clearly then, the writer's criticism may well be interpreted as a defence of the honour of the Church. This is especially true when we consider the very human aspect of imperfection that Bernanos knew exists within the Church and the "saints", its warriors:

La maison de Dieu est une maison d'hommes et non de surhommes. Les chrétiens ne sont pas des surhommes. Les saints pas davantage, ou moins encore, puisqu'ils sont les plus humains des humains.¹

In fact, Bernanos considered that Christianity and the Church are inextricably bound up with sin: "Une paroisse, c'est sale, forcément. Une chrétienté, c'est encore plus sale."² It is to cleanse themselves of their inner filth and corruption that Christians congregate within the Church. The writer's attack on the visible Church militant must not be misconstrued as an assault on the invisible Church of the Saints. Yet, because of the rare qualities that his saints possess, it might be thought that Bernanos considers them a super-race of heroic creatures. Nothing could be further from the truth. As we study their individual destinies and explore another of the avenues along which Bernanos makes contact between man and God, we shall see that they succeed in cultivating virtues that form their armour plate against Satan and help them to encourage others to follow the lead of Jesus Christ, their model:

Les saints ne sont pas sublimes, ils n'ont pas besoin du sublime, c'est le sublime qui aurait

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 286.

² Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1038.

plutôt besoin d'eux. Les saints ne sont pas des héros, à la manière des héros de Plutarque. Un héros nous donne l'illusion de dépasser l'humanité, le saint ne la dépasse pas, il l'assume,...Il s'efforce d'approcher le plus près possible de son modèle Jesus-Christ, c'est-à-dire de Celui qui a été parfaitement homme, avec une simplicité parfaite,...¹

Symbolizing the spirit of divine love in the world, the "saints" of Bernanos reflect the truth and light of Christianity. They therefore constitute the very lifeblood of the Church. Moralists believe that sanctity is a luxury. They fail to see that like the Church, it is a necessity.² In fact, for Bernanos, the Church with its army of Christians, is one of the surest means of focusing the attention of the modern world upon the person of Jesus Christ, and through His suffering and death, upon the tragic mystery of mankind's salvation, his solitary pilgrimage along the path of reconciliation with the kingdom of grace.

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 286.

² Ibid., p. 288.

CHAPTER VI

The movement towards God

Sanctity: The spiritual adventure to paradise

In the Bernanosian universe, the misery of the "saints" is no less intense than that experienced by sinners. Since they live in a world riddled with corruption, one that is preoccupied with material values, the "saints", who are dedicated wholly to spiritual matters, find themselves constantly misunderstood. Because those among whom they live have lost their capacity for love, the "saints" are regarded with suspicion and hatred. As Canon de la Motte-Beuvron points out to the curé of Ambricourt, the innocence and simplicity of "saints" merely provoke the hostility of society: "ces gens ne haïssent pas votre simplicité, ils s'en défendent, elle est comme une espèce de feu qui les brûle."¹ Each will feel keenly the pain of separation from his fellows, yet the grace of "enfance", the spirit of poverty, their profound humility like other Christian virtues, will help them to bear their suffering in silence so that they remain in communion with God.

The most striking feature about the isolation of "saints" is that unlike sinners, they are not separated from their Creator.

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p.1174

We recall that the "solitude" of sinners is typified by a painful moral and spiritual emptiness, and an ever widening rift with society and God. Then too, sinners are frequently in a state of rebellion. The sterile immobility that destroys their joy arises out of a refusal to love, a conscious rejection of God. Their state is characterised by hatred and always associated with Satan.

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The "solitude" of the "saint" is of a radically different nature. Because of the sublime virtues that are inborn and assiduously cultivated throughout a life of travail, because above all, he possesses the genius of love, the "saint" never harbours resentment against society or Heaven, in his heart, no matter how great the extent of his suffering. His willingness to share the suffering of others, his total abandonment to the will of God, allow the "saint" to preserve a heart that is pure. Because his life is characterised by the Charity of Christ, it is lived in constant contact with God.

The loneliness of "saints" derives from the fact that they are in disharmony with the milieu in which they live. Witness for example, the words of Dean Menou-Segrais to the future Saint de Lumbres:

Sur la route que vous avez choisie--
non! où vous vous êtes jeté!--vous
serez seul, décidément seul, vous
marcherez seul. Quiconque vous y
suivrait,¹ se perdrait sans vous
secourir.

¹

Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p.228

The implication is evident. The road to God that the "saints" have chosen is one of almost complete isolation, on the social level. We shall see that the two "saints", Chantal de Clergerie, and the curé of Ambricourt together with Blanche de la Force, the Carmelite nun, are all alienated from the community in which they serve.

However, we will understand that the moral and spiritual suffering that "saints" experience, the chief source of their pain, derive less from their social alienation than from the spectacle of sin and the tragic "solitude" of sinners by which they are constantly confronted. Donissan, the Saint de Lumbres, is bowed down by this sense of dejection as he contemplates "l'effrayante horreur du péché, le misérable état des pécheurs, et la puissance du démon."¹ The despair that shatters his inner peace almost makes him a prisoner of Satan:

- Prince du monde; voilà le mot décisif. Il est prince de ce monde, il l'a dans ses mains, il en est roi. "...Nous sommes sous les pieds de Satan, reprend-il après un silence. Vous, moi plus que vous, avec une certitude ²désespérée. Nous sommes débordés, noyés, recouverts.

It is their apparent uselessness in alleviating the misery endured by God's creatures that provokes "the temptation of despair" which saps the spiritual energy of Chantal de Clergerie, the curé of Ambricourt and Blanche de la Force. Yet, none will submit

¹Ibid., p.225

²Ibid., p.261

to Satan. Their unswerving faith and the habit of prayer that they develop, help them to maintain contact with the divine presence, and in fact, strengthen their relationship with Heaven.

For Bernanos then, the "saints" are the principal actors on the stage of Christianity. Integrally bound up with the Church and its mission to recover the source of lost joy,¹ the "saints" model themselves on Christ. They follow the path of "solitude" yet yearn to encourage less fortunate souls along this route of reconciliation.

If then our examination of the "saints" unfolds the suffering of their isolation, the harrowing temptation of their despair, it will at the same time throw into prominent relief their constant and unceasing attempts to maintain communion with God and to create a reconciliation with Him for the whole human race. For Bernanos, their spiritual existence will furnish us with an example of man's leap towards perfection. In a very real sense, then, the "saints", as the inner core of the Church, incarnate for the author, a vision of solidarity and co-operation in God.

Although Bernanos is profoundly disturbed by the predominance of evil in his universe, and above all by the manner in which man is alienated from his Maker, he does not despair. Instead, he summons the "saints" to the aid of humanity. Witness the words of the Saint de Lumbres, in Sous le

¹
Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne,
p.1239

soleil de Satan: "Entre Satan et Lui, Dieu nous jette, comme son dernier rempart."¹

With an almost inflexible will, dauntless courage, and unshakeable faith, this earliest "saint" of Bernanos is equipped with qualities that make him an epic figure, as Yves Bridel notes in these terms:

Plus qu'un saint, l'abbé Donissan est un héros d'épopée: Sous le soleil de Satan est l'épopée de la sainteté. Son héros ... est doué d'un physique de soldat et sa violence, son courage, sa foi simple en font un frère de Roland et d'Olivier. Bernanos ne cesse de mettre entre lui et son héros la distance nécessaire pour en faire un personnage plus grande que nature.²

The dynamic qualities of Donissan render him an exception among the "saints" of Bernanos. The epic stature that makes him so worthy a counterpart of Roland and Olivier will never again appear after this first novel of Bernanos. Donissan is the only "saint" who is patterned on the character of the curé of Ars. The three characters whom we are about to study, Chantal de Clergerie in L'Imposture and La Joie, the curé of Ambricourt in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, and Blanche de la Force in Les Dialogues des Carmélites, all draw their inspiration from the character of the author's beloved Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux. Bernanos does not include Blanche, a nun, in his specified category of saints. However, she is presented in this study together with Chantal and the parish priest since she ultimately resembles them. Possessing the Theresian qualities of "enfance", "pauvreté" and

¹
Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 256.

²
Yves Bridel, L'Esprit d'enfance dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Georges Bernanos, Lettres Modernes, Collection "Thèmes et Mythes", (Paris: Minard, 1966), p. 53.

humility, these "saints" differ from Donissan in that they never appear to be superhuman. However, each submits to an intolerable destiny of tragedy to which Bernanos refers as : "sa solitude effrayante, fondamentale, la solitude des enfants de Dieu."¹

If then "solitude" is as typical a feature in the life of the "saint" as it is in the existence of the sinner, we must bear constantly in mind that there is a fundamental difference. What the "saint" experiences is a profound Christian sorrow which stems from his inability to help sinners in their fight against corruption. Born of divine charity, this sadness fosters union and communion with God.

Chantal de Clergerie, who first appears towards the end of L'Imposture and who is the principal character in La Joie, is a stout-hearted adolescent who draws her spiritual and moral fortitude from the Theresian "esprit de confiance et d'abandon"², two qualities of "enfance" that Bernanos loved. Living in an environment of domestic discord, her life is spent in the diligent pursuit and development of the highest possible Christian virtues.

A simple girl of eighteen, she works towards the cultivation of humility, one of the virtues of a life dedicated to God. The lessons taught by her beloved spiritual director, abbé Chevance:

¹
Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p.605

²
Ibid., p. 554.

"Notre vie est petite, souvenez-vous.
Notre vie doit s'écrire en un style très
familier dont Notre-Seigneur a seul la
clef, s'il y a une clef."¹

So well has she learnt this lesson of complete contentment with the simple things of life, that her father is amazed at her attitude, so totally alien to his own:

D'ailleurs, tu es facile à contenter,
je l'avoue. Tu as le sens de l'abnégation,
du sacrifice, je dirais même l'instinct.
Quelle grâce de Dieu! Savoir prendre
sa joie dans la joie des autres, c'est
le secret du bonheur.²

Chantal is in fact one of those rare creatures in whom the virtue of charity is developed to such an extent that she finds her greatest joy in the happiness of others. She therefore, presents a striking contrast to her over-ambitious and grasping father and her greedy, demented grandmother, who share the household she supervises. The renunciation of personal desires is part of her secret: "Elle croyait n'avoir jamais rien désiré au-delà de ce qu'elle était capable d'atteindre..."¹ The fact is that the grace of poverty has been bestowed upon her: "la pauvreté, une pauvreté surnaturelle, fondamentale, avait brillé sur son enfance, ainsi qu'un petit astre familier, une leur égale et douce."³ In her desire to build a healthy inner life, she also re

¹
Ibid., p. 555

²
Ibid., p. 583

³
Ibid., p. 553

recognizes the importance of cultivating an attitude of complete submission to God's will. She therefore sets out to become "si docile et si souple entre les mains divines que nul ne s'en doute."¹

In order to be deserving of His love, she becomes totally dependent upon her Creator for spiritual and moral guidance. What she tells her spiritual advisor, abbé Chevance, expresses her surrender to God's will: "Je reçois chaque heure que Dieu me donne parce que je n'aurais même pas la force de refuser."² She is unwilling to risk being absent from the exact place where she feels instinctively God wishes her to be:

... il importait avant tout de s'écarter le moins possible de ce point précis où Dieu nous laisse, et où il peut nous retrouver dès qu'il lui plaît.³

Her whole life develops into a pattern of conformity with the will of God, for we note that Chantal's sole interest is in loving and serving Him: "Je voudrais n'être qu'un petit grain de poussière impalpable, suspendue dans la volonté de Dieu."⁴ It is not at all surprising that so devout a creature should bear the hallmark of the Creator upon her: "il semblait qu'il fût en elle comme le

¹Ibid., p. 556.

²Ibid., p. 556.

³Ibid., p. 558.

⁴Ibid., p. 604.

signe ineffable de la présence de Dieu, Dieu lui-même qui resplendissait dans son coeur."¹ The fact that she radiates this peace and joy of Jesus Christ which fills her soul is evident from the remark that the Russian chauffeur addresses to her: "Vous avez pitié de tout, vous souriez à tout, même aux feuilles des arbres, même aux mouches."²

Yet, the life of Chantal is not devoid of suffering. The selfish nature of her paternal grandmother, symbolised by the bunch of keys forever in her clutches, the comedy that the old woman constantly acts out to unburden her guilt-ridden conscience for having ruthlessly persecuted and, perhaps killed, Chantal's mother, deeply distress her granddaughter. The frail adolescent is also severely tested by the wordly and ambitious nature of her father, his intrigue to gain a place in the Academy, the arranged marriage he manoeuvres for this purpose and his indifference to his daughter's welfare. What perhaps plagues her most of all, is his determination to abandon her against her will, to the isolation of a convent. He is very well aware that her piety does not include the exile of a cloistered life. Chantal's spiritual and moral burden is increased still more by the sinister inhabitants in her household. Its members include Fiodor, the lustful Russian chauffeur, addicted to

¹Ibid., p. 553.

²Ibid., p. 548.

gambling, drugs and alcohol. He has surprised her in an ecstatic moment of prayer and concludes that she is a "saint". He taunts her with the knowledge of this secret and humiliates her with threats to reveal it. Chantal is especially distressed by his lying and hypocrisy. Fiodor will eventually murder her, then commit suicide.

La Pérouse, the mediocre psychiatrist and abbé Cénabre, the priest without faith, for whose salvation Chantal is unknowingly responsible, also severely test her spiritual and moral strength. Both seek to use their rationalistic approach to religion, their high degree of intelligence and their renown, to overcome the simplicity of this holy girl and divert her from a life devoted to God. Yet, perhaps the most terrifying moments of her "solitude" occur after the death of her simple father confessor. In this connection, the author's observation is significant:

Ce moribond avait été son
espérance, son honneur, sa
fierté, la chère sécurité de
sa vie, et elle les perdait à
la fois.¹

Without the love and protection of the priest, Chantal will be abandoned to the forces of evil around her: "la douce ignorance où il avait si longtemps laissé sa fille allait se changer tout à coup, ... en une affreuse solitude."² Only after witnessing

¹Georges Bernanos, L'Imposture, p. 529

²Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 560

the priest's death agony will Chantal begin to grasp the awful power of Satan. A new vision of her world arises in the singular perspective of "solitude":

...l'étroit univers familier dans lequel elle était née, où elle avait vécu, prenait un aspect nouveau. Il semblait que les choses elles-mêmes lui fussent devenues étrangères,... Et voilà que sous les damas et les ors perçait leur pauvreté lamentable, leur bassesse. Elle ne les voyait plus sans un malaise indéfinissable, une espèce de méfiance craintive ... Et à mesure que se transformaient ainsi sous son regard les lieux et les aîtres, les figures, les gestes, les voix se dénonçaient à leur tour, livraient une part de leur secret. Trop passionnée pour en concevoir la médiocrité, ou trop pure pour en jamais réaliser l'ignominie, elle ne sentait que leur tristesse, la tristesse de tant d'heures perdues, d'entreprises inutiles, de rancunes, d'inimitiés, d'ambitions, dures comme la pierre, et plus légères que des songes.¹

If this vision evokes in Chantal a deep sense of Christian sorrow, it more especially communicates her profound compassion for the misery of all abandoned souls: "Qu'ils étaient loin d'elle, tous! Qu'ils étaient errants et malheureux!..."² She instinctly bows before the full weight of suffering created by the mass of sinners that she seems incapable of helping, and Bernanos stresses the bitter self-doubt, the savage sensation of sadness and compassion that sweep over and all

¹Ibid., pp. 562-563

²Ibid., p. 563

but engulf her soul.¹

She makes herself personally responsible for the lamentable affliction of each member of her home. Their misfortune affects her with such intensity as to finally evoke in her heart the gentle mercy of Christ:

"Hélas! ils n'avaient que moi,
dit-elle. Dieu les oublie!" L'idée
de cette solitude sans recours, éter-
nelle, à peine eût-elle osé la conce-
voir, brisa d'un coup toute résistance,
l'acheva.²

In his attempt to seduce Chantal with the temptation of despair, Satan has doubtless overlooked "la divine espérance, qui était la source de sa vie."³ Instead of submitting to this temptation, she makes a last desperate effort. Her automatic response is to glide into the long-cultivated habit of "conversing" with God:⁴

Elle leva vers le Christ pendu au mur
un regard avide,... elle glissa sur les
genoux, se jeta dans la prière, les
lèvres serrées, les yeux clos, comme
on tombe, ou comme on meurt.⁵

Her humble sacrifice is accepted⁵ and Bernanos focuses attention upon

¹Ibid., p. 565

²Ibid., p. 681

³Ibid., p. 554

⁴Ibid., p. 565

⁵Ibid., p. 681

the parallel between the destiny of Christ and that of Chantal to emphasize the sense of solidarity between the two:

Bien des fois, en effet, depuis l'enfance,
 elle s'était sentie portée par la pensée
 auprès du Dieu solitaire, réfugié dans
 la nuit comme un père humilié entre les bras
 de sa dernière fille, consommant lentement
 son angoisse humaine dans l'effusion du
 sang et des larmes, sous les noirs oliviers ...¹

Although Chantal's union with the Creator is unmistakable, it is noteworthy that her suffering is in no way diminished.² By her acceptance of the suffering of those around her, by her self-sacrificial death at Fiodor's hands, Chantal is able to win salvation for abbé Cénabre and no doubt, for the other souls in her vicinity. The sight of Chantal's death on his behalf prompts the priest to utter the first words of the "Pater Noster" that signal his sincere entry into the faith.

The ordeal of "solitude" to which Chantal is condemned, both in her life and death, is a harrowing spectacle. Yet it is one that we shall learn is typical of the vocation of sanctity. In this respect, the words of Fernande, the cook, are revealing:

¹Ibid., p. 683

²Ibid., p. 681

Monsieur, on ne m'ôtera pas de l'idée qu'elle a voulu cette mort là -- pas une autre -, celle-là. Elle n'était jamais assez humiliée, elle ne désirait que le mépris, elle aurait vécu dans la poussière. Ce Russe, c'était le plus méchant de nous tous, sûrement. Alors c'est de lui qu'elle aura souhaité recevoir sa fin ... Elle aura tout renoncé, monsieur, je vous dis, même sa mort.¹

Because of her love for God, she accepts the total humiliation of a death that is in complete accord with His will. Her self-sacrifice, like His, will help the sinners around her to awaken from their infamous night of "solitude". Her charity will set in motion "la douce pitié de Dieu" which miraculously permits lost creatures to enter once more into the light of God's grace. We shall see by his actions towards suffering sinners that the curé of Ambricourt is the spiritual brother of Chantal de Clergerie.

Through the daily notations in his diary where the problems of his life as a priest in the parish of Ambricourt are related in stark simplicity, the humble country priest allows the reader to become aware of the Christian virtues that he cultivates.

We have seen that the quality of simplicity is so ingrained in his nature that it arouses anger and hatred in others.² His humility is also to be noted from his interview with the Countess:

¹Ibid., p. 723

²Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1174.

"Madame, ai-je dit, si haut que la richesse ou la naissance nous ait placés, on est toujours le serviteur de quelqu'un. Moi, je suis le serviteur de tous. Et encore, serviteur est-il un mot trop noble pour un malheureux petit prêtre tel que moi,..."¹

He considers himself totally unworthy of running the affairs of even a tiny parish like Ambricourt, feeling that his lack of capability might prove "un danger pour les âmes!"² Together with the innocence of "enfance", he possesses the spirit of poverty:

Si sévèrement que je me juge parfois,
je n'ai jamais douté d'avoir l'esprit
de pauvreté. Celui d'enfance lui
ressemble. Les deux sans doute ne
font qu'un.³

This simplicity of heart is to be equated with an abandonment to the will of God for guidance. Not surprisingly then, the question that is constantly on the young curé's lips: "Suis-je là où Notre-Seigneur me veut?"⁴ Surrender to God so that His will may be accomplished, is, for this pastor, the only means of surmounting the despair that will follow him like a shadow. His supernatural hope will doubtless be protected by the unconscious realization that "Pour rencontrer l'espérance, il faut être allé au-delà du désespoir."⁵ The little country priest is willing to venture into the domain of temptation to rescue souls from Satan.

¹Ibid., p. 1146.

²Ibid., p. 1141

³Ibid., p. 1246

⁴Ibid., p. 1097

⁵Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire? p.14

The harsh night of despair that awaits the poor, inexperienced curé is forecast in the opening pages of Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, where his parish appears in an atmosphere of corruption resembling a decomposing segment of Christianity that is in a state of fermentation.¹ The minister is inundated by the sense of despair that his parish exudes: "Un désespoir avorté, une forme turpide du désespoir, ..." ² The reaction it inspires is instinctive: "Jamais je n'avais senti si cruellement sa solitude et la mienne."³ Yet his awareness that he is a servant of Love assures him that he will get divine assistance in bearing whatever burdens lie in store for him: "Car le Maître que nous servons ne juge pas notre vie seulement--il la partage, il l'assume."⁴ Further, because of "cette connaissance surnaturelle de soi-même, de soi-même en Dieu, qui s'appelle la foi: "..., his faith will remain intact."⁵ He is therefore ready to accept the task of rooting out sin and corruption from his parish. But he will concern himself solely with the little things of the present that bring peace to the troubled heart. He instinctively seems to know in advance the lesson which his friend, the curé of Torcy, will preach to him:

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1032.

² Ibid., p. 1032.

³ Ibid., p. 1031

⁴ Ibid., p. 1097

⁵ Ibid., p. 1129

- Travaille,... fais des petites choses, en attendant, au jour le jour. Applique-toi bien. Rappelle-toi l'écolier penché sur sa page d'écriture, et qui tire la langue. Voilà comment le bon Dieu souhaite nous voir, lorsqu'il nous abandonne à nos propres forces. Les petites choses n'ont l'air de rien, mais elles donnent la paix... La prière des petites choses est innocente. Dans chaque petite chose, il y a un Ange.¹

The existence of the country priest is beset by profound physical suffering. Constantly in pain² from a cancer of the stomach³ of which he is unaware, the pastor is often ill,⁴ is given to violent attacks of nausea⁵ that induce much vomiting of blood.⁶ His body is further enfeebled by the need to fast. He is at best restricted in diet⁷ to dry bread and a little wine. His ill-health causes him to feel anxiety and tensions that often induce insomnia and leave him physically exhausted.

Confronted by a multitude of fears, "une peur pour chaque fibre,"⁸ the curé finds himself equally tormented in spiritual and

¹Ibid., pp. 1191-1192

²Ibid., p. 1058

³Ibid., p. 1240

⁴Ibid., p. 1059

⁵Ibid., p. 1194

⁶Ibid., p. 1209

⁷Ibid., p. 1063

⁸Ibid., p. 1228

moral affairs. His self-confidence is gradually eroded. In consequence he seems to mismanage even the simplest of undertakings and is thus regarded by all as incapable. His attempts at organizing a boy's club are as unsuccessful as his preparation of his catechism class. The parents of Séraphita Dumouchel are unjustly suspicious of his conduct with their precocious adolescent daughter, and are openly hostile. His pupils, who frequently mock him, display the same hostility.¹ He is regarded as a secret drinker by his parishioners² and the Count considers him incapable of directing his wife and daughter in matters of morality and Christian conduct. His failure even pursues him into the minor departments of his domestic life. In spite of his good intentions, then, his position in the parish becomes extremely difficult.³

The "solitude" of this wretched clergyman assails him to the point of destroying his inner peace. He can feel compassion neither for himself nor for others. This "hémorragie de l'âme"⁴ with which he is afflicted, part of the temptation of despair, obliges him to make frantic efforts to re-establish contact with God: "Ma solitude est parfaite et je la hais. Nulle pitié de moi-même."⁵

While he feels that the desire to pray is a sufficient sign of his need for God, and that that desire is all He asks, this feeling

¹Ibid., p. 1051

²Ibid., p. 1225

³Ibid., p. 1183

⁴Ibid., p. 1099

⁵Ibid., p. 1113

brings neither respite nor reward.¹ Yet he never ceases to cultivate the habit of prayer. The diary he writes is an extension of this habit, for through it, he converses with God.² Whenever spiritually exhausted he longs for the presence of Christ. At such times, prayer to him is "aussi indispensable que l'air à mes poumons, que l'oxygène à mon sang."³ The problem of his broken contact with God therefore increases his burden of "solitude". Nervous anxiety over his inner turmoil renders sleep impossible, and late into the night, he keeps vigil over his parish:

Même solitude, même silence. Et cette fois aucun espoir de forcer l'obstacle, ou de le tourner. Il n'y a d'ailleurs pas d'obstacle. Rien. Dieu! je respire, j'aspire la nuit, la nuit, entre en moi par je ne sais quelle inconcevable, quelle inimaginable brèche de l'âme. Je suis moi-même nuit.⁴

To re-establish his inner tranquillity, he humbles himself before God, making the gesture of complete obeissance: "Je me suis étendu au pied de mon lit, face contre terre ... Je voulais seulement faire réellement le geste de l'acceptation totale, de l'abandon."⁵

¹Ibid., p. 1111

²Ibid., p. 1048

³Ibid., p. 1111

⁴Ibid., p. 1113

⁵Ibid., p. 1113

He knows by instinct that "on ne prie jamais seul."¹ Although he continues to hope fervently for God's presence, his desire is vain: "Ma tristesse était trop grande, sans doute? Je ne demandais Dieu que pour moi. Il n'est pas venu."²

Possessing the patience of the poor, the curé refuses to believe that he has lost the heroic virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.³ His faith is such that he knows God will guard him from all impurity.⁴ Although he is convinced that "les biens éternels"⁵ are of paramount importance to man, he is struck with horror when he discovers that he is not striving to attain them.⁶ While in the grip of this sadness, he cannot but contemplate the awful power of sin and of Satan: "C'est toi, c'est toi seul qui as déchaîné la mort dans le monde!"⁷ As he records these moments of his greatest temptation, he is appalled at the ever widening rift between himself and Heaven:

¹
Ibid., p. 1112.

²
Ibid., p. 1112.

³
Ibid., p. 1117.

⁴
Ibid., p. 1126.

⁵
Ibid., p. 1117.

⁶
Ibid., p. 1117.

⁷
Ibid., p. 1129.

J'ai écrit ceci dans une grande et plénière angoisse du coeur et des sens. Tumulte d'idées, d'images de paroles, L'âme se tait. Dieu se tait. Silence.¹

He feels that it might ease his pain to talk to his spiritual advisor and friend, the curé of Torcy. Yet, he believes that yielding to the temptation of complaining about his personal grief to anyone but God might bring even greater misfortune:

Si je céda^ris à la tentation de me plaindre à qui que ce fut, le dernier lien entre Dieu et moi serait brisé, il me semble que j'entrerais dans le silence éternel.²

Although his "solitude" persists, the curé never ceases to carry out his parochial duties. He will learn to accept his situation as a prisoner of the Divine Agony³ and will recognize that it is through the habit of prayer and his communing with others in pain, that his own anguish, and that of others, will be assuaged. Prayer leads the sinner into communion with God and His Love annihilates the pain, the source of which is Satan.

The priest's conduct towards the Countess and her daughter, who are both in revolt against Heaven, reveals something of the mystery by which reconciliation is brought about and will be reserved for the final chapter.

¹Ibid., p. 1129

²Ibid., p. 1130

³Ibid., p. 1187

This remarkable priest transmits to wretched souls, the love of God which he feels deeply and sincerely for them. Because of his love, he sees the world as one huge human family of which God is the Father.¹

On learning that he is dying from cancer, the minister is deeply perturbed that death will find him with less than the courage necessary to meet his Maker worthily, like a Christian. Tears fill his eyes and he is too sincere and simple to deny that he may be weeping from fear. He recognizes however that they may be tears of love: "Oh! je ne nie pas que ces larmes pouvaient être lâches! Je pense aussi que c'étaient des larmes d'amour ..."²

It is the "enfance" of the young pastor that will lead him little by little to accept this final trial with resignation.³ Only as the end draws near will he be reconciled with himself and be able to look upon death as "la grande paix du soir où nous allons entrer ensemble."⁴ He will therefore be able to say in all simplicity:

Je ne tourne pas le dos à la mort,
je ne l'affronte pas non plus, ... J'ai
essayé de lever sur elle le regard le plus
humble que j'ai pu, et il n'était pas
sans un secret espoir de la désarmer,
de l'attendrir ... Hélas! il y faudrait
l'ignorance et la simplicité des petits
enfants.⁵

¹Ibid., p. 1161

²Ibid., p. 1242

³Ibid., p. 1254

⁴Ibid., p. 1254

⁵Ibid., p. 1255-1256

After the realization that "l'agonie humaine est d'abord un acte d'amour"¹, the humble curé will finally be afforded the divine revelation: "Tout est grâce."²

The indissoluble alliance between sanctity and "solitude" is particularly well illustrated by the portrait of this young priest whose whole existence is poisoned by the agony of his alienation. We cannot fail to note his love for his fellow men: "J'ai aimé naïvement les âmes (je crois d'ailleurs que je ne puis aimer autrement)"³ nor his eagerness to serve God, (as Bernanos himself observes: "il aura servi le bon Dieu dans la mesure même où il croira l'avoir desservi.")⁴ Through his charity and dedication, Séraphita will recover her purity⁵ just as the Countess will conquer her "solitude" by overcoming her refusal to love.⁶ Even the fiery Chantal, Bernanos implies, will eventually discard her rebellious attitude.⁷ The mystical sanctity of the curé of Ambricourt illuminates the pages of his diary and the portrait of this "saint" resembles that of other "saints" and translates for the reader a significant aspect of the writer's vision of

¹
Ibid., p. 1256.

²
Ibid., p. 1259.

³
Ibid., p. 1255.

⁴
George Bernanos, "Notes", Oeuvres Romanesques, p. 1846.

⁵
George Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1200.

⁶
Ibid., p. 1165.

⁷
Ibid., p. 1226.

solidarity. We shall see that the Carmelite, Blanche de la Force, also cultivates the sublime virtues of sanctity.

Blanche de la Force, the central character in Les Dialogues des Carmélites, is born in an atmosphere of terror which transmits to the young noblewoman a sense of "solitude" that will help to shape her destiny.

The fragility of her nature, the constant terror which haunts her, have the effect of reducing her to a state of deep humiliation. In fact, the long trial of shame that awaits Blanche would drive the stoutest heart to despair, and as we examine her personal qualities together with certain events in her life, we will become increasingly aware of the wretched experience of anguish that never ceases to dog her footsteps.

Her features reveal the almost constant state of horror that perturbs her brother¹ and makes him apprehensive over her "imagination malade".² He views her deeply disordered state as "la crainte refoulée au plus profond de l'être, c'est le gel au coeur de l'arbre..."³ The unexpected sight of a servant's shadow makes her scream in fear.⁴ Having entered Carmel, she is summoned to the bedside of the dying Prioress where she stands immobilized with horror.⁵ Terrified by the

¹Ibid., p. 1571

²Ibid., p. 1570

³Ibid., p. 1570

⁴Ibid., p. 1576

⁵Ibid., p. 1606

atrocious death agony that she is witnessing, she falls to her knees, hides her face in the bedclothes and breaks into a fit of sobbing.¹ While keeping vigil over the body of the dead Prioress and left alone for an instant, the wretched girl takes fright and flees.² When a dwarf with grimacing features, the people's representative, enters her cell, she is filled with terror.³ On hearing the chant of the carmagnole, and seized by a panic of fear and trembling, Blanche accidentally destroys the little King of Glory.⁴ In fact, she spends a lifetime learning to cope with and partake of the agony that accompany so many of her personal experiences. Her life of suffering is reserved for the very few whom God has ordained to be prisoners of "la Très Sainte Agonie".⁵ It is not by chance that the name she chooses as a nun is Soeur Blanche de l'Agonie du Christ.⁶

The playwright takes pains to portray Blanche as one who is alienated from those around her. Although she doesn't despise society and the numerous attractions it exercises on others, the incompatibility between her nature and that of the world she lives in is unmistakable:

¹Ibid., p. 1608

²Ibid., p. 1608

³Ibid., p. 1638

⁴Ibid., p. 1656

⁵Ibid., p. 1575

⁶Ibid., p. 1587

Je ne méprise pas le monde, il est à peine vrai de dire que je le crains, le monde est seulement pour moi comme un élément où je ne saurais vivre. Oui, mon père, c'est physiquement que je n'en puis supporter le bruit, l'agitation; les meilleures compagnies m'y rebutent, ...¹

The emphasis on Blanche's physical inability to cope with worldly matters is significant. The truth is that from childhood she has shown a predisposition towards the cultivation of a life devoted to God. For example, she has always been drawn to the contemplation of Christ's agony in the garden. For her, there is only one morning, Easter. Each night, however, is a repetition of the Divine Agony.²

Although a Carmelite nun, Blanche bears a striking resemblance to the "saints" we have studied, for she is filled with love for God and for all of His suffering creatures. This has led her to undertake the self-imposed task of keeping company with Christ during His Agony: "Je meurs chaque nuit pour ressusciter chaque matin."³ Her acceptance of the destiny of "solitude" without a rebellious heart also indicates her willingness to embark upon the spiritual journey to Paradise that is usually reserved for "saints".

At the outset of her career, she is warned by the Prioress about the ordeal of "solitude" to which a true Carmelite nun is exposed:

¹Ibid., pp. 1578-1579.

²Ibid., p. 1575.

³Ibid., p. 1575

"vous ne savez rien de la solitude où une véritable religieuse est exposée à vivre et à mourir."¹ Her Superior also warns that of all her girls, Blanche is "la plus menacée."² She announces the forboding calamity that threatens Blanche's future: "De grandes épreuves vous attendent, ma fille"³ Yet in spite of her numerous trials, and although haunted by a deep Christian sorrow, Blanche's faith remains constant. Nothing will eradicate her hope that Heaven has chosen her to perform a specific task: "Si je n'espérais pas que le Ciel a quelque dessein sur moi, je mourrais ici de honte à vos pieds."⁴ Like her spiritual brother, the curé of Ambricourt, she is willing to submit to and accept the continual testing of her physical, spiritual and moral mettle. Such is her humility that she would gladly accept to remain invisible, "passer inaperçue."⁵ In fact, if she could arrange to be left completely alone so that "personne ne pensât plus à moi ..."⁶, she would be quite satisfied. She is ready to strip herself bare, to lead a life of simplicity, abandoning herself totally to His will and completely renouncing all worldly possessions: "Je lui sacrifie tout, j'abandonne tout, je renonce à tout pour qu'il me rende l'honneur."⁷ Her attitude displays

¹ Ibid., p. 1584.

² Ibid., p. 1600

³ Ibid., p. 1584

⁴ Ibid., p. 1579

⁵ Ibid., p. 1583

⁶ Ibid., p. 1702

⁷ Ibid., p. 1579

the high degree to which she has developed her innate virtues of "enfance" and poverty.

Both indicate the vocation of sanctity she accepts as her personal Calvary.

Her entry into Carmel illustrates the sincerity of her total surrender to God's will. It entails much sacrifice, for as she mentions, the decision involves giving up the advantages of a dignified social position to live in a community under the authority of Superiors whose birth and education are often inferior to hers.¹ Even more difficult perhaps, is her decision to abandon the three people in life whom she loves most dearly: her father, her brother and her friend.

Such ordeals, however, are not beyond the capacity of Blanche. She is drawn to Carmel by "l'attrait d'une vie héroïque."² She is ready to follow the advice of her beloved Prioress who recognizes that her protégée has already cultivated some of the virtues of Christianity. Not in the least afraid of poverty,³ willing to remain "cette chose douce et maniable dans Ses mains",⁴ Blanche has also been taught that "Les saints ne se révoltaient pas contre eux-mêmes,..."⁵ Revolt, she learns, stems from Satan and leads directly to despair.⁶

The anguish of Blanche's alienation from the religious community

¹Ibid., p. 1578

²Ibid., p. 1583

³Ibid., p. 1601

⁴Ibid., p. 1601

⁵Ibid., p. 1601

⁶Ibid., p. 1601

fosters her understanding that no disgrace is too great for a Christian to bear. She is therefore no longer humiliated by her fear and admits to Mère Marie:

La peur n'offense pas le bon Dieu.
Je suis née dans la peur, j'y ai
vécu, j'y vis encore, tout le monde
méprise la peur, il est donc juste
que je vive aussi dans le mépris.¹

The long succession of trials to which Blanche submits, tests her main weakness, the fear of "solitude". This voluntary suffering helps to purify her soul so that she will be granted the grace to face her death with courage.²

It is not by chance that the "saints" we have chosen to study from the fiction of Bernanos include two women and one man. Further, each is drawn from different sectors and strata of life. The curé of Ambricourt is a parish priest of peasant background. Chantal de Clergerie is a lay figure belonging to a circumscribed family circle, and Blanche de la Force is a member of the aristocracy who becomes a Carmelite nun. The implications are rather obvious. Sanctity is limited neither to sex nor social milieu. It may in fact blossom at any social level, within the Church, among those who lead contemplative lives or even in the secular world.

It is important to note that all three figures face completely different obstacles. For example, the curé of Ambricourt is handicapped

¹Ibid., p. 1702

²Ibid., p. 1719

by ill-health from his stomach cancer, and surrounded by the hostility of parishioners and superiors. Chantal is confined to a life of isolation within the bosom of a family household whose wicked inhabitants create for her a personal Calvary. Blanche de la Force inherits a timid nature, feels constantly ostracized by the world in which she lives and enters Carmel. There, she remains an outsider, for her timidity is evident to all and she must suffer the constant ridicule and humiliation caused by this weakness. For example, Mère Marie opposes Blanche's taking of the veil for this reason, and the whole religious group believes that she lacks the courage to honour their communal vow of martyrdom. Because of her fearful nature, it is even suggested by a companion that her name should really be Blanche de la Faiblesse.

Yet in spite of their trials, none of these "saints" will submit to Satan's temptation of despair. Because of their devotion to a spiritual life, all difficulties are reduced to a series of spiritual hurdles which they surmount through the intensity of their Christian life.

In the portraits of Blanche de la Force, of Chantal de Clergerie and of the curé of Ambricourt, Bernanos presents three figures whose conformity to the example set by Christ permits them to cultivate their capacity for love to its ultimate limits. However, in recreating these personages, the writer makes it clear that there is no attempt on his part "recomposer du dedans la vie d'un saint ... véritable, authentique, donné pour tel par l'Eglise."¹ In fact,

¹Georges Bernanos, Le Crépuscule des Vieux, p. 73

the author of Le Crépuscule des Vieux vehemently disclaims any such intention: "On ne refait pas le frère Jean-de-la-Croix, ni sainte Thérèse. Non!"¹ His "saints" are used in his writing as God used His Son in the Creation: to teach mankind by example. These aims are expressed by the writer in an interview with Frédéric Lefèvre:

Je désirais simplement -- mais passionnément, j'avais passionnément besoin -- de fixer ma pensée, comme on lève les yeux vers une cime dans le ciel, sur un homme surnaturel dont le sacrifice exemplaire, total, nous restituerait un par un chacun de ces mots sacrés dont nous craignons d'avoir perdu le sens. Je ne demandais pas à mon saint des émotions esthétiques, mais des leçons. Je rêvais de regarder en lui, sublimés par la grâce, notre amour déçu, le périlleux désespoir où déjà grondait la haine. Et encore cette leçon même, j'aurais voulu aussi la transmettre, la traduire à mes frères plus malheureux.²

The writer felt the need for his "saints" to provide a human example from which each man and woman might draw inspiration. By portraying the total self-sacrifice of these creatures in whom the temptation of despair and the urge to revolt ^{are} transformed into devotion for God, by a sublimation of grace, Bernanos furnishes man with the means of recovering his lost innocence through the cultivation of Christian virtues.

¹Ibid., p. 73

²Ibid., pp 73-74

We again note the writer's determination to cleanse man from sin so that he can be conducted back into the Kingdom of Heaven.

As with the Church, the "saints" of Georges Bernanos perpetuate the mystery of Jesus Christ and project the author's vision of reunion between man and God. We shall see that this vision is further illuminated by the emphasis placed upon the Christian doctrine of the Communion of Saints in the author's writing.

CHAPTER VII

The movement towards God

The Communion of Saints: the key to solidarity

Although the contribution made by both the Church and the "saints" to the Christian philosophy of Georges Bernanos has been discussed, the study of the writer's solution to the problem of "tragique solitude" would be incomplete without an explanation of the Christian doctrine of the Communion of Saints.

Not only is this a cardinal doctrine of the Church of Christ, implying as it does, its ultimate aim of reunion between man and God, but it is also bound up with the Christian community of the saints and therefore with the divine will and purpose of which they are the human representatives. In consequence, a Christian writer like Bernanos would consider it his duty to enlist his creative literary efforts in the service of a doctrine which reveals "la mystérieuse solidarité de Dieu et de l'homme, qui est le plus auguste mystère des chrétiens."¹ Since this doctrine teaches the participation of all men in Christ, their mystical union with one another in God, Bernanos assigns to it an integral role in creating the recurrent yet mysterious patterns harmonizing and fusing the themes of alienation and reconciliation in his fiction.

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 256.

In each of his polemical studies as well as in his fictional works, the writer can be seen constantly wrestling with the problems of "tragique solitude" and with the solution that is offered for it in the Communion of Saints. It appears evident that he had spent a lifetime pondering deeply upon the mystery of this doctrine before he arrived at the solution offered in some of his novels. It is certainly most prominently displayed in his final play.

As Bernanos reflects upon the mysterious working of the Communion of Saints, he is especially attracted to the idea that suffering may be exchanged, like a cloak, between different individuals. It thus follows naturally that one individual may suffer for the sins of another and thus assume the burden of that person or even of a whole group. The playwright presents this view in Les Dialogues des Carmélites. After witnessing the scandalous death that comes to the Prioress in spite of the exemplary life she has led, Soeur Constance voices to Blanche de la Force the conclusions she has drawn concerning the exchange of suffering between different people:

Pensez à la mort de notre chère Mère,
Soeur Blanche! Qui aurait pu croire
qu'elle aurait tant de peine à mourir,
qu'elle saurait si mal mourir! On dirait
qu'au moment de la lui donner, le bon
Dieu s'est trompé de mort, comme au
vestiaire on vous donne un habit pour un
autre... Ça veut dire que cette autre,
lorsque viendra l'heure de la mort, s'étonnera
d'y entrer si facilement...¹

1

Georges Bernanos, Les Dialogues des Carmélites, p. 1613.

Since the Prioress sensed the great ordeal of pain that Blanche would be called upon to endure,¹ and because she loved Blanche dearly,² she was willing to offer her life in exchange for Blanche's safety: "Pour détourner cette menace, j'aurais bien donné ma pauvre vie. Oh! certes, je l'eusse donnée..."³ Unfortunately however, the Prioress knew she was dying. It occurred to her therefore, that all she had to offer in exchange for the protection of Blanche, was her own death. She gave it willingly: "Je ne puis donner maintenant que ma mort, une très pauvre mort..."⁴

The words of Soeur Constance to Blanche after the event, throw additional light on Bernanos' interpretation of the working of the mystery involved in the doctrine of the Communion of Saints:

On ne meurt pas chacun pour soi, mais les uns pour les autres, ou même les uns à la place des autres, qui sait?⁵

Thanks to the offering of the Prioress and to the profound humiliation that Mère Marie de l'Incarnation is obliged to suffer on behalf of Blanche, this timid creature will miraculously find the courage to face her death fearlessly.

The interaction between destinies, so well expressed in the writer's final literary work, is also a key idea illuminating many of his novels. For example, in Sous le soleil de Satan, abbé Donissan spends a lifetime suffering for the sinners of his parish and especially

¹
Ibid., p. 1584.

²
Ibid., p. 1600.

³
Ibid., p. 1600.

⁴
Ibid., p. 1601.

⁵
Ibid., p. 1613.

for Mouchette. Although Bernanos does establish a bond between the 'saint' and the sinner, the relationship is somewhat tenuous. In fact, it is impossible to overlook the almost casual manner in which the link between the two destinies is made when the priest and the adolescent girl accidentally meet on the road to Desvres:

Il l'entraînait déjà, tout en parlant, ...
 Elle le suivait. Elle devait le suivre.
 Il parlait, comme il n'avait jamais parlé,
 comme il ne parlerait plus jamais, même
 à Lumbres et dans la plénitude de ses dons,
 car elle était sa première proie.¹

After she has become the bride of Satan and cut her own throat in a fit of infernal rage, the saint succeeds in dragging her from the grip of the enemy. His act of bringing her back to the Church, at her own request, provides more than a suggestion that she is re-integrated into the ranks of the faithful. These assumptions concerning Donissan's expiation and Mouchette's redemption are supported by Bernanos himself in Le Crépuscule des Vieux:

Le dogme catholique du péché originel et de la Rédemption surgissait ici, non pas d'un texte, mais des faits, des circonstances et des conjectures. Le problème posé, aucune solution n'était possible que celle-là. A la limite d'un certain abaissement, d'une certaine dissipation sacrilège de l'âme humaine, s'impose à l'esprit l'idée du rachat...

Ainsi l'abbé Donissan n'est pas apparu par hasard: le cri du désespoir sauvage de Mouchette l'appelait, le rendait indispensable.²

¹ Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, p. 200.

² Georges Bernanos, Le Crépuscule des Vieux, pp. 57-58.

However sound these arguments might appear, it is accurate to state that the bonds between the "saint" and the sinner are flimsy. In L'Imposture, the writer will take much greater care than in his first novel to link the destiny of his "saint" to that of his sinner. Witness how a common destiny is firmly established between the faithless priest, Cénabre, and the "saint", abbé Chevance, who has already begun to bear the extra burden of suffering for the salvation of his wretched colleague:

"Je suis maintenant son unique ami!"
L'évidence de leur commune solitude
l'écrasait. D'être lié ainsi, malgré
lui, à l'insu de tous, au prêtre
célèbre... (à) son redoutable destin,
lui avait longtemps paru comme un
mauvais rêve, dont il allait s'éveiller.¹

By his ordeal of suffering, abbé Chevance helps to atone for the wrongs of abbé Cénabre, his non-believing colleague. However, he dies before the task is completed and the burden of suffering is transferred to Chantal de Clergerie, his protégée. In La Joie, this chaste adolescent Chantal, will endure considerable anguish and finally submit to a scandalous death in order to atone for all the sinners in her household. Yet, her suffering and death will be offered especially for the salvation of the soul of Cénabre, who is eventually reconciled with God before losing his reason. The writer himself testifies to the fact that Cénabre has been saved, in a letter to a friend in December, 1928: "Dieu frappe sa raison après un éclair de la grâce..."²

¹
Ibid., pp. 516-517.

²
Albert Béguin, Bernanos par lui-même, p. 162.

In reviewing each of those situations where there has been an exchange of destinies, we note the writer's insistence on the willingness of an individual to accept suffering on behalf of one of Satan's victims for the salvation of the latter. In short, the operation of the Communion of Saints is set in motion by the manifestation of love that appears in different forms in the creative world of Bernanos.

There is of course the suffering associated with self-sacrifice, that is a similar act of love as was performed by Christ, to redeem mankind. In L'Imposture and La Joie, for example, the suffering that is undertaken by abbé Chevance and his protégée, helps to redeem the galaxy of sinners in their vicinity. The self-sacrificial death that Chantal de Clergerie offers especially for the salvation of abbé Cénabre, also provides an example of the successful operation of the Communion of Saints, based on the form of love involved in self-sacrifice.

Another example of suffering as an act of love is provided by the curé of Ambricourt in one of his confrontations with Chantal, the rebel daughter of the Countess, whose sadness at her revolt against Heaven is evident to the priest. Once confronted by the spectacle of such misery, the curé himself becomes filled with misery because of the genuine love he feels for God and for ²suffering ¹other human creatures. His reaction to the anguish of Chantal is shared by all those "saints" who, like him, have cultivated the highest Christian virtues:

Je pouvais à peine soutenir cette tristesse, et en même temps, je souhaitais de la partager, de l'assumer tout entière, qu'elle me pénétrât, remplît mon coeur, mon âme, mes os, mon être.¹

¹Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1135.

Assuming the weight of mankind's distress, the "saint" introduces the suffering individual into the Divine Presence. He is aware that "nos peines ne nous appartiennent pas, il (Dieu) les assume, elles sont dans son coeur."¹ In some mysterious way, the "saint" is able to shepherd suffering creatures into communion with the mystical body of Christ. Through His Charity, the sinful soul is purified, the heart filled with love and, in fact, a mysterious transformation occurs in the nature of the revolted creature, who can be reconciled with God, thanks to His grace.

The lesson that the curé of Ambricourt teaches the Countess, is another means of realizing God. Noting her rebellion against Heaven for the death of her beloved infant son, the priest is deeply moved by the sincerity of her grief. Yet, at that crucial point of the interview, when he feels powerless to help deliver her from "cette paix terrible des âmes refusées,"... which is the worst form of despair,² he receives a grace that inspires him to act promptly and effectively. The lesson of love he teaches helps the Countess to understand her mistakes. She is to realize that God is "l'amour même."³ If therefore she wishes to continue loving, the only means of retaining one's purity of heart, she must re-enter and install herself within the realm of Love, and therefore of God.⁴ She must learn finally that one neither bargains with God nor imposes conditions upon Him:

¹
Ibid., p. 1164.

²
Ibid., p. 1160.

³
Ibid., p. 1160.

⁴
Ibid., p. 1158.

"Ma fille, lui ai-je dit..., on ne marchandé pas avec le bon Dieu, il faut se rendre à lui, sans condition. Donnez-lui tout, il vous rendra plus encore."¹

Once the aristocrat learns these secrets of love, "une main mystérieuse venait d'ouvrir une brèche dans on ne sait quelle muraille invisible, et la paix rentrait de toutes parts,...² The curé of Ambricourt radiates the love of Christ so that it fills the hearts of those in travail and appeases their rebellious souls. It is because of this love that he is able to bring suffering creatures to the notice of the members of the august body of the Communion of Saints. Through the mysterious interaction that occurs within this mystical body, those in despair are led back into the kingdom of hope.

The tremendous emphasis that is placed upon the virtue of suffering by Bernanos arises naturally from his knowledge of a principle that is fundamental to Christian dogma. God could have redeemed the world in any way he wanted. However, He chose to accept the divine grief and pain involved in giving the life of His beloved Son for man's redemption. By his acceptance of suffering and death on The Cross, as a man, God sets the supreme example for man to follow. The virtue of "acceptation" by human beings thus becomes for Bernanos one of the most patent manifestations of humanity's love for God. What the author of La Liberté pour quoi faire? points out is significant. It is only through "acceptation" that man can perform the task of total self-renunciation that is implicit in an act of true devotion. In so doing, he makes use of his soul and thereby participates in the

¹
Ibid., p. 1161.

²
Ibid., p. 1162.

in the mystery of the Communion of Saints:

Quiconque se sert de son âme,
si maladroitement qu'on le
suppose, participe aussitôt
à la Vie universelle, s'accorde
à son rythme immense, entre de
plain-pied, du même coup, dans
cette communion des saints qui
est celle de tous les hommes
de bonne volonté auxquels fut
promise la Paix, cette sainte
Eglise invisible dont nous savons
qu'elle compte des païens, des
hérétiques, des schismatiques ou
des incroyants, dont Dieu seul sait
les noms.¹

Yet Bernanos does not only present theories to communicate his convictions, he provides examples in La Liberté pour quoi faire? which indicate that reconciliation between man and God is accomplished through "acceptation". He describes a man and a woman overwhelmed by despair at the suffering they must endure without apparent reason:

Il y a en ce moment, ... tel
pauvre homme qui joint les
mains et du fond de sa misère,
sans bien savoir ce qu'il
dit, ... remercie le bon Dieu
de l'avoir fait libre, de
l'avoir fait capable d'aimer.
Il y a... une mère près de
son enfant mort qui offre à
Dieu le gémissement d'une
résignation exténuée, comme
si la Voix... (de Dieu) venait
de lui murmurer doucement à
l'oreille: "Pardonnez-moi.
Un jour, tu sauras, tu compren-
dras, tu me rendras grâce. Mais
maintenant, ce que j'attends de
toi, c'est ton pardon, pardonne."²

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire?, p. 283.

² Ibid., pp. 280-281.

Although frustrated by the misery of their "solitude", both the man and the woman succeed in finding within themselves the capacity for love that each human being possesses. In spite of their inability to understand the working of the divine will, they make a tremendous effort of self-renunciation. It is only by cultivating the virtue of humility, of total confidence in God, that they are able to bring their will into complete conformity with the will of God. In so doing, they manage to find the faith necessary to preserve a heart that is purged of all bitterness and resentment against God for the apparent injustice of His harsh decree. Only through love do they find room in their hearts for forgiveness. The writer goes on to state that the simple act of faith which induces sinners to forgive the apparent cruelty of the Creator's judgment, is born of "acceptation", by which means each individual enters into the Communion of Saints. The charity of Christ that accords sinners the grace of sanctity is undoubtedly made possible by their contact with the members of Christ's suffering body:

1 Oui, au moment où cet homme,
 cette femme acceptaient leur
 destin, s'acceptaient eux-
 mêmes, humblement - le mystère
 de la Création s'accomplissait
 en eux, tandis qu'ils couraient
 ainsi sans le savoir tout le
 risque de leur conduite humaine,
 se réalisaient pleinement dans
 la charité du Christ, devenant
 eux-mêmes, selon la parole de
 saint Paul, d'autres Christ. ¹
 Bref, ils étaient des saints. ¹

¹Ibid., pp. 281-282

Bernanos is determined to make us understand that the cultivated virtue of "acceptation" arises from the recognition that as a human being, each individual is a creature, not the Creator. Feeble and limited, he gradually learns to recognize his subordination to God and to content himself with dependence upon Him for sustenance and direction. Finally, he recognizes that understanding and illumination do not come through intelligence¹ but rather depend on the capacity for love that is superior to the intellect as a means of understanding the mysteries of the Creation. The reason provided by the writer is infinitely simple: "C'est que la création est une oeuvre d'amour."²

A final example, drawn from the author's fiction, will illustrate how grace is attracted from those in Christ's mystical Communion of Saints to the individual who develops the Christian virtue of "acceptation". In Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, Bernanos portrays a simple charwoman from a sanatorium, the friend of an unfrocked priest, who is the comrade of the curé of Ambricourt. In conversation with the dying pastor, this mystery-oriented woman acquaints him with the torment of "solitude" in which she lives. Deeply moved by her simplicity and devotion, the curé wishes to use her experience to learn how an alienated victim succeeds in overcoming the instinctive spirit of revolt, a prerequisite for "acceptation". He therefore questions her anxiously:

¹
Ibid., p. 279.

²
Ibid., p. 279.

"Enfin, lui dis-je, votre vie est dure...ne désespérez-vous donc jamais?" "N'êtes-vous jamais tentée de vous révolter?--Non, m'a-t-elle répondu, seulement, des fois je n'arrive plus à comprendre.--Alors?"¹

The woman's reply sums up the Bernanosian attitude of resignation and provides us with a further insight into the mystery of "acceptation" that lies at the basis of the Communion of Saints:

Hé bien, donc, lorsque je ne suis plus capable de rien, que je ne tiens plus sur mes jambes, avec mon mauvais point de côté, je vais me cacher dans un coin, toute seule et ... je pense à tous ces gens que je connais pas, qui me ressemblent... Je me glisse parmi eux, je tâche de me faire petite, et pas seulement les vivants, vous savez? les morts aussi, qui ont souffert, et ceux à venir, qui souffriront comme nous... "Pourquoi ça? Pourquoi souffrir?" qu'ils disent tous ... Il me semble que je le dis avec eux, je crois entendre, ça me fait comme un grand murmure qui me berce. Dans ces moments-là, je ne changerais pas ma place pour celle d'un millionnaire, je me sens heureuse.²

This distressed creature manages to find the solution to her inner anguish by gliding into the midst of suffering humanity. She voluntarily shares in the suffering of all the wretched creatures who belong to the Communion of Saints and are drawn together in Christ;

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1252.

² Ibid., p. 1252.

by her charity she enters into the secret of the Creation. It seems that her act of devotion sets in motion the mysterious current of divine charity that accomplish God's will of shepherding lost wayfarers back to Him. Perhaps it is the intercession that occurs within the body, on her behalf, and no doubt, on behalf of the world of sin, that transports her into "la charité du Christ, ..." ¹ Then only is she miraculously granted the grace of divine peace. ²

What becomes clear in the examples chosen is that the essence of love, implicit in the attitude of "acceptation" and inherent in self-sacrifice for others, sets in motion the operation of grace that lies in the mysteries of the Communion of Saints.

Although Bernanos goes as far as he dares in proposing the possible working of the mysteries involved in this fundamental Christian doctrine, he takes special care to present this mystery by suggestion and implication rather than by dogmatic, assertive demonstrations. His determination not to violate the mysteries of Christianity and particularly of the solidarity principle at the basis of the Communion of Saints, is expressed by his little country priest whom he loved more than any of his other characters:

Je crois que si Dieu nous donnait une idée
claire de la solidarité qui nous lie les uns aux
autres, dans le bien et dans le mal, nous ne
pourrions plus vivre, en effet. ³

¹ Georges Bernanos, La Liberté pour quoi faire? p. 281

² Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1252

³ Ibid., p. 1159

From our study of the interaction between the destinies of sinner and "saint" we notice that the Christian vision of Bernanos incorporates within it the alienation of his characters from God. In fact, the experience of "solitude" is used as a means whereby an inner transformation is brought about in an individual who is eventually accorded the grace to join with God. The writer succeeds in analyzing the inner anguish of modern man who, without knowing it, is seeking to accept what to him is normally unacceptable: the suffering and death to which all must submit.

Yet if reconciliation is accomplished through the mysterious operation of the Communion of Saints, it follows naturally that there is a distinct possibility of salvation for alienated creatures like Evangéline, Simone Alfieri and Monsieur Ouine.

The profound sympathy and understanding that the writer displays towards "imbéciles", "enfants humiliés" and egomaniacs in earlier chapters, offer additional weight in support of this viewpoint. Still more evidence is provided by the insistence of Bernanos that the world is filled with alienated victims who resemble the woman from the sanatorium. He even permits her to catalogue a series of human beings, both dead and living, who are likewise crushed by the suffering of "solitude":

... je pense à tous ces gens
que je ne connais pas, qui me
ressemble^{nt} et il y en a, la
terre est grande!--les mendiants
qui battent la semelle sous la
pluie, les gosses perdus, les
malades, les fous des asiles
qui gueulent à la lune, et tant!
et tant!...et pas seulement les
vivants, vous savez? les morts aussi,
qui ont souffert, et ceux à venir,
qui souffriront comme nous...¹

¹
Ibid., p. 1252.

The implications that all these sufferers share the peace of resignation brought about by communion is unmistakable.

Yet the most powerful arguments in support of the claim that lost souls will eventually be saved are provided by four examples from the author's fiction. Because the writer's character portrayal indicates clearly that a misguided murderess like Germaine Malorthy, an imposter priest like abbé Cénabre, a proud and rebellious creature like the Countess, a weak and timid soul like Blanche de la Force, are all successful in surmounting their "solitude", we must conclude that Georges Bernanos was convinced that all mankind could be saved and undertook in his fiction, the mission to participate in their salvation. It is perhaps significant to point out at this juncture that the author's convictions are completely in accord with the Christian belief that Christ died to save all men.

It becomes evident then that through his portrayal of the Church, the "saints" and the working of the Communion of Saints, Bernanos presents a systematic demonstration of ideas that merge to produce a recurrent yet mysterious pattern uniting individual alienation with divine reconciliation. With this in mind, we are inclined to view the possibility of salvation for all afflicted by "solitude" in the light of the author's revelation in La Joie: "Rien n'est hors de l'ordre, tout finit par rentrer dans l'ordre de Dieu."

¹Ibid., p. 1252

²Georges Bernanos, La Joie, p. 576.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters we have seen that for Georges Bernanos, the tragedy of "solitude" is one of the major problems that confronts the human being. In his short stories, his novels, his polemical work, the lectures he frequently gave towards the end of his life, his final play and sometimes even in his personal correspondence, the writer is constantly preoccupied with portraying for his reader or his audience, the fact that the pain of "solitude" afflicts every single human being. We note that it dogs the footsteps of the devout Christian who lives in close contact with the Church, just as it tracks down the atheist and agnostic who seek to evade or escape temporarily from its pursuit. Time and again Bernanos indicates that no individual is safe or exempt from this torment; it shatters the spiritual peace of rich and poor, just and unjust, saint and sinner.

His personal experiences as a soldier in the trenches during the First World War no doubt serve to focus his attention upon the infinite suffering of his fellow men and more particularly perhaps upon the terror that assails them as they die.

As a Christian writer who was committed to the struggle against evil in all its forms and especially to the task of alleviating the suffering of mankind, Georges Bernanos could not sit idly by and watch the steady despiritualization of humanity. He felt obliged to testify on behalf of his faith. Not content with revealing the malig-

nancy that was destroying the sacred work of the Creation, he was determined to show how it could be cured.

He first depicts how evil crushes a man's hope by corrupting his soul. He portrays as well the destiny of damnation reserved for those who forsake God. In order to achieve his aim, he creates a décor of "solitude", employing a complex arrangement of images dealing chiefly with atmospheric conditions such as darkness and light, heat and cold, wind and rain. These are closely associated with others including animals, disease, and putrefaction which are organized into groups that revolve around the central ideas of silence and "solitude". In this manner the writer evokes the nightmare world of evil that his characters inhabit and conjures up the despair that burdens them. His atmosphere of "solitude" also emphasizes the warning he directs to mankind: "Briser cette solitude, ou périr."¹

It would seem that the vast and disquieting spectacle of human misery in the world arouses the profound compassion of the writer and induces him to compose his first novel Sous le soleil de Satan, in which a "saint" and a sinner experience the common anguish of "solitude" in spite of their vastly different life styles. L'Imposture, and La Joie are other major works of fiction which may be regarded as restatements of a similar situation.

¹ Georges Bernanos, Le Crépuscule des Vieux, p. 27

All the other works of fiction, Un Crime, Un Mauvais Rêve, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, Monsieur Ouine and Les Dialogues des Carmélites, likewise depict the hell on earth that man must endure.

Yet Georges Bernanos keeps constantly in his mind the fact that the very Christ who was crucified was the same divine figure who elected to redeem the world from sin. He therefore continually reminds his reader: "Dieu a sauvé chacun de nous, et chacun de nous vaut le sang de Dieu."¹

Yet the writer realized that preaching, by itself, was insufficient to make man accept a truth that is beyond the grasp of his reason. In order therefore to overcome mankind's lack of faith, his growing despair, Bernanos creates a series of portraits in which Satan's victims, alienated by their refusal to love, become significantly reconciled with Heaven, even before they die.

He also evokes for his reader a very personal vision of the Church, which conducts humanity directly to God. Further, with its ministers of God and its suffering congregation of sinners, the Church is once more transformed. Through the power of the writer's imagination, it becomes a vast army, marching to storm the citadel of Paradise, and to rediscover for mankind "le Royaume perdu de la Joie."

In the vanguard of this army, directly responsible for guiding and controlling the progress of this Heaven-bound train, there is a race of simple creatures, the "saints". Armed with

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Georges Bernanos, Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, p. 1068.

nothing more than their limitless charity, their humility, and a genuine spirit of self-sacrifice, these dedicated souls form a bulwark against Satan and sin because of their unwavering faith, their love for God and for their fellow men. By preaching the gospel of love, by voluntarily shouldering the world's sin, by laying down their lives to win salvation for lost creatures, these instruments of divine grace imitate the example of Christ. Not only do they provide examples of the unifying power of Christ's love, but they indicate the path of sanctity that is the surest means for each human being to find God. By their words and deeds they encourage men to renounce their life of sin and "solitude" in order to travel the road to salvation and to divine solidarity.

In his presentation of the Church as in his portrayal of the "saints", the writer can be seen making a systematic attempt to communicate to the world his solution to the crisis of human "solitude". Both portraits are especially aimed at awakening humanity to their destiny of optimism. Yet more than anything else perhaps, they convey an exalted vision of the pilgrimage to Paradise that Bernanos feels is the destiny of man.

This message of reconciliation with God is especially reinforced by his emphasis upon the Christian doctrine of the Communion of Saints. Appearing in many of his major works of fiction, this doctrine teaches the supernatural union that exists between creature and Creator through the suffering members of the human race, living and dead, who form the body of the Church.

We note that it is only after enduring the intense anguish of "solitude" that sinners can be induced to come to terms with them-

selves, and humbly accept God. Each individual seems to become purified by the suffering involved in his condition of misery until eventually, "solitude" engenders an attitude of "acceptation".

Through the miraculous exchange of suffering involved in the Communion of Saints, Bernanos permits each of his victims to share in the agony of Christ. In this perspective, the suffering of "solitude" becomes an act of love which awakens the gentle mercy of Christ and sets into motion the currents of His love in the world.

The Communion of Saints adds yet another dimension to Bernanos' Christian vision wherein man is stripped of original sin and elevated to the full dignity of the perfection he lost in the Garden of Eden.

This drama that we have studied with its portrayal of the "saints", the Church and the working of the Communion of Saints, conjures up for modern civilization a representation of the chief avenues whereby man can reenact his Christian destiny by moving from "solitude" to solidarity in the private world of Georges Bernanos.

1
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* A complete bibliography would necessitate far more space than we have at our disposal in this dissertation. The purpose of this short bibliography is to indicate those articles, studies, letters and lectures which are most important for understanding Georges Bernanos. I wish to thank Mr. Michel Estève and the editors of the Etudes Bernanosiennes for the compilation of this material. (C.N.R.)

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