

***Lacrimae Rerum—Tears at the  
Heart of Things:  
Jacques Maritain and Georges Rouault***

**Bernard Doering**

In his *Journal d'un Théologien*, the famous Dominican (later Cardinal) Yves Congar recounts his memories of the meetings of the *Cercle Thomiste* at Jacques Maritain's home, first in Versailles and later in Meudon. He describes the attitudes that predominated at the early meetings in which he participated. There was, he wrote, a kind of intrepid and absolute faith in the slightest detail of a text of St. Thomas. Everyone seemed sympathetic to *Action Française* and more or less shared in its massive over-simplifications, its solid disdain for others, its brutal conviction of being right and of possessing the truth, in sum, a group spirit completely lacking in any nuance whatsoever. To one degree or another, Maritain, the recent convert, shared in this attitude. It was, says Congar, the Maritain of *Théonas*, of *Antimoderne*, of *Three Reformers* and *The Dream of Descartes*. There was a prevailing orthodoxy that was literary, philosophical and political as well as dogmatic and religious. There was general agreement that Henri Ghéon was the greatest playwright, del Sarte the greatest sculptor, Maurice Denis the painter who had no equal.

But, to tell the truth, says Congar, Maritain was bigger than all this. There was within him another Maritain, the real Maritain, the artist, the revolutionary, the friend of Péguy, the Dreyfusard, the free spirit which corrected and went beyond the Maritain of the early meet-

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ings of the *Cercle Thomiste*, the Maritain, says Congar, of *Art and Scholasticism*, of the *Réponse à Jean Cocteau*, of *Integral Humanism* and all that followed.<sup>1</sup>

So *Art and Scholasticism*, seems to have been the first sign of his breaking away from the intransigent zeal of those years. Raïssa wrote in *Les Grandes Amitiés* that it was in thinking of Georges Rouault that Maritain composed *Art and Scholasticism*.<sup>2</sup> And concerning Rouault, Jacques himself wrote that “a philosopher could study in him the virtue of art as in its pure state, with all its demands, its mystery and its purity.”<sup>3</sup> His friendship with Rouault seems to have been one of the first influences that helped free him from the conservative constraints imposed by the spiritual directors at the early meetings of the *Cercle*.

I was first introduced to Rouault by Maritain’s essay “Three Painters” and another essay by Wallace Fowlie, and, after I viewed his paintings in museums and consulted a number of art books, he became one of my very favorite painters. One of the greatest pleasures of my research visits to Kolbsheim was the opportunity to view the “Miserere” series. Rouault had given to Maritain a complete set of the 58 black and white engravings that make up the collection, and once Antoinette Grunelius learned that I loved and admired Rouault, she would set up at each visit the complete set in the immense foyer of her chateau for me and my wife, Jane, to view at our leisure.

The “Miserere” gets its title from the first word in Latin of one of the penitential psalms that is used most often in the liturgies of Lent and at funerals: *Miserere mei deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam* (“Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy”). It is a plea for forgiveness. Rouault had his own understanding of this psalm. In addition to its being a plea for the forgiveness of the sins of individuals against God which were the cause of the sufferings and death of Christ, for him it was also, and especially, a plea for forgiveness for the sins of society against the poor and the weak.

The title of this essay derives from the subtitle of plate XXVII of the “Miserere:” *Sunt lacrimae rerum*. These words themselves come from a famous line in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. When Aeneas arrives at Carthage and, in a temple there, sees a frieze depicting the fall of Troy and the deaths of the Trojan heroes, his family and his friends, he exclaims with profound

1. Yves Congar, *Journal d’un Théologien* (Paris: Cerf, 2000), p. 35ff and footnote 94.

2. Raïssa Maritain, *Les Grandes Amitiés* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1962), p. 169.

3. Jacques Maritain, *Frontières de la Poésie* (Paris: Rouart, 1935), p. 133.

sadness: "Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt" (There are tears at the very heart of things, and the mortal nature of those things troubles the mind of man).

Who was this great intimate friend of Maritain? Georges Rouault was born of a working-class family in the Belleville *faubourg* or suburb of Paris, in the cellar where his parents had taken refuge to escape the bombardment by government troops during the uprising of the Commune in 1871. A Parisian suburb was not like our suburbs, full of green lawns and large houses where we live to escape the crowding and the grime of our city centers. The "faubourgs" were the dingy areas encircling Paris where the poor lived in crowded tenements and dirty hovels next to the factories where they worked. (*Rue des solitaires*—Street of the lonely people).

In Rouault's family there reigned an extraordinary artistic and cultural atmosphere, closely related to working with material—creating art—the opposite of the bourgeois mentality of buying art for decoration. As a child he spent hours making chalk drawings on the floor of his poor home. On Sundays he took frequent walks with his grandfather along the quays of the Seine searching the book stalls for prints, especially of Manet and Courbet. He was proud of his humble beginnings and of his artisan heritage. He was a poet too. He wrote:

In the *faubourg* of toil and suffering,  
 In the darkness I was born.  
 Keeping vigil over pictorial turpitudes,  
 I toiled  
 Miles away from certain dilettantes.

[Plate X: *Au vieux faubourg des longues peines* (In the old suburb of long sorrows).]

His father was an *ébéniste*, that is, a skilled craftsman, a maker of fine furniture, who worked at the Pleyel piano company. He tells of his father wincing when his wife opened a drawer too suddenly or too violently. Wood suffers too, he would say to her.

In 1895, at the age of 14, Rouault was apprenticed to a stained-glass restorer. It was at this work that he developed what he called his "passionate taste" for bright colors and his love for ancient stained-glass windows. He had a deep admiration for and an almost mystical affinity to the anonymous artisan-workers of Romanesque times and the early Middle Ages. This work marked him for life.

Rouault had a very difficult career at the beginning. He was disparaged by art critics who completely misunderstood him. They ridiculed his



Plate X Au vieux faubourg des longues peines

“déformations,” his “gribouillage” (scribbling or doodling). They had no way of classifying him. Was he a Primitive like Rousseau *le douanier*? Was he a Fauve like Derain?

Maritain, however, did understand him. His first text on art, and well before any article he published on philosophy, was an introduction to the catalogue of the first exposition of Rouault's works at the *Galerie Druet* in February and March of 1910, and which was published under the pseudonym “Jacques Favelle.” In his *Carnet de Notes* Maritain tells us that Rouault asked him to choose a name for his signature that would suggest a connection with the workers who built the cathedrals of France. “Favelle” was a good find as a working-class name; it concealed Jacques's identity as the grandson of Jules Favre.<sup>4</sup>

To a self-portrait Rouault gave the title *L'Apprenti* (The Worker-apprentice). In his introduction, Maritain called Rouault a true primitive who was a popular or people's artist, for his frank and naïve inspiration is very close to that of the happy artisans of days gone by, those of Romanesque and early medieval times. He spoke of Rouault's “naïve images, made by a patient workman who loved his tools and the matter he was working on,” who loved his craft “with a serious and obstinate passion and with a constant need to perfect his technique.” Already in 1910 Maritain seemed to foresee in an uncanny way the central inspiration of the great “Miserere” collection. He wrote that Rouault “finds his inspiration, not in some abstract system or some literary emotion, but in what life itself, the life of [his own] time and of [his own country], makes him, so to speak, touch with his finger.”<sup>5</sup>

There seem to have been three great influences on Rouault the artist: the painter Gustave Moreau, the author Léon Bloy, and the philosopher Jacques Maritain.

In 1900 Rouault left his apprenticeship to study painting at the *Académie des Beaux Arts*, first under Robert Delaunay, then under Gustave Moreau. Moreau was a Catholic who distrusted all forms of dogma and ecclesiastical hierarchy. He had a deep attachment to his Faith, especially as an iconographic storehouse. Rouault admired Moreau's interior sentiment of humility before the spiritual dimension of all reality, before the sacramentality of the universe. He loved the sacramentals of Catholic liturgical tradition: bread, wine, water, fire, candles, oil, palms, ashes, incense, etc. He was radically independent from all artistic schools and encouraged his students

4. Nora Possenti-Ghiglia, *Cahiers Jacques Maritain* (Publication of the *Cercle d'Etudes Jacques et Raïssa Maritain*, Kolbsheim, France) 12 (November, 1985), p. 10, n 12.

5. Jacques Maritain, “G. Rouault,” *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, 12 (November, 1985), p. 24.

to develop their own particular styles and to guard ferociously their own independence. During this time, Rouault himself came to conceive of faith as a profoundly religious sentiment, which, though not articulated, demanded absolute abandon.

As for Bloy, Rouault knew him before Maritain did. It was at Bloy's home that Maritain first met Rouault; they both were frequent visitors.<sup>6</sup> Jacques wrote that "What [Bloy] revealed to them cannot be expressed: the tenderness of Christian brotherhood and that kind of trembling pity and fear before a soul ... marked by the love of God."<sup>7</sup> They were astounded by his practice of voluntary poverty and by his all-consuming love of the poor. Bloy did not understand or appreciate Rouault's art. He "accused him, affectionately, but without much consideration for his feelings, of falling into a demonic form of art and of finding delight in ugliness and deformity. [Rouault] would listen, motionless, ashen and silent."<sup>8</sup> Bloy's writings and conversations were filled with fulminations against the complacent and indifferent rich. He insisted on the centrality of the "Cross" in the life of the Christian and on the role of suffering in the life of the entire Mystical Body of Christ. Maritain was impressed enough to list in his writing on Bloy a series of quotations on the subject of suffering.

—Suffering passes away—to have suffered does not.

—A heart without affliction is like a world without revelation. It sees God by a feeble glimmer of light.

—Man has places in his heart which do not yet exist and into which suffering enters so that they may come to be. I would never finish if I wanted to describe the marvelous effects of suffering on man's faculties and on his heart. *It is the handmaiden of creation.*"

—Our hearts are filled with angels when they are filled with affliction.<sup>9</sup>

The influence between the painter and the philosopher was mutual. In a wonderfully perceptive essay "Jacques Maritain and Rouault. At the fountain-head of a fruitful friendship" Nora Possenti-Ghiglia wrote:

It is difficult, for anyone who was not a part of this friendship, to grasp the value of the exchange between the philosopher and the painter "in the inexpressible regions

6. Raïssa Maritain, p. 167.

7. Jacques Maritain, *Quelques pages sur Léon Bloy, Œuvres Complètes*, vol. III, p. 1022.

8. Jacques Maritain, *Frontières de la Poésie*, p. 135.

9. Jacques Maritain, "In Homage to Our Dear Godfather Léon Bloy," in *Untrammelled Approaches* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 37-39.

of the heart" (as Maritain put it), but everything leads us to believe that this exchange was as fruitful for one as for the other. And perhaps the dialogue which resulted from the contact between their personal sensitivities and experiences was less noticeable in explicit allusions in their writings, than in the very sensitivity with which Maritain approached the problems of art and of poetry, and in the way in which Rouault gradually emerged from that "abyss of sorrow and of infinite melancholy" which he bore within himself.<sup>10</sup>

In 1909 the Maritains moved to Versailles and the Rouaults followed two years later. There they met frequently, and the Rouaults took meals with the Maritains on an almost weekly basis and held long conversations together.<sup>11</sup> They discussed religion, mysticism, social justice, the philosophy of beauty and the practice of art. Rouault found in Maritain an understanding and sympathetic listener with whom he could escape from his solitude, to whom he could speak of himself and of his art before a lively and open intelligence. It was in thinking of Rouault that Maritain, as mentioned, wrote *Art and Scholasticism* and he made frequent references to his artist friend in *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. This "grand philosophe" even babysat the four Rouault children,<sup>12</sup> whom their father listed in a little poem which Maritain affectionately cites in "Three Painters" (from *Frontières de la Poésie*):

<i>Geneviève mon gros bourdon</i>	Genevieve my bumble bee
<i>Isabelle ma colombelle</i>	Isabelle my little dove
<i>Michel faible pilier de la maison</i>	Michel feeble pillar of the household
<i>Agnès petit pigeon</i>	Agnes my little pigeon

On one occasion Jacques took the six year old Geneviève and her little sister Isabelle to the doctor to have them operated for tonsils and adenoids. As they walked to the Clinic Geneviève held the hand of this "grand philosophe" and Isabelle rode on his shoulders. Jacques had given up a whole day of work, Geneviève wrote later, to replace her parents who were "too impressionable" to assist at the operation.

The two friends shared a profound respect for the common people and the poor. In his essay "Exister avec le peuple" Maritain wrote:

10. Possenti-Ghiglia, p. 9.

11. Ibid.

12. Genevieve Nouialle-Rouault, "Maritain, Rouault et Nous," *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, no. 4-5 (November, 1982), pp. 79-84.

If we love that living human thing which we call the people ... we will want first and foremost to exist with them, to suffer with them and remain in communion with them.

Before "doing good" to them and working for their benefit, before practicing the politics of one group or other ... we must first choose to exist with them, and to suffer with them, to make their pain and destiny our own.<sup>13</sup>

Maritain wrote of Rouault: "What he sees and knows with a strange pity, and what he makes us see, is the miserable affliction and the lamentable meanness of our times, not just the affliction of the body, but the affliction of the soul, the bestiality and the self-satisfied vainglory of the rich and the worldly, the crushing weariness of the poor, the frailty of us all."<sup>14</sup>

Maritain was not disturbed by the "distortions," the "déformations," the "gribouillage," that Bloy so insensitively ridiculed. He wrote that Rouault seeks to "reproduce as much as he possibly can the truth of the things that move him," with a kind of "naïve frankness" or "frank naïvete." "He knows that truth is never found in the copy." He does not see things in their banality. "He has an imaginative vision of things, he contemplates them in the world of their greater reality and it is in this world that he paints them."<sup>15</sup> In *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, Maritain wrote:

Saint Thomas insisted that art imitates nature *in her operation*—not in respect to natural appearances, but in respect to the ways in which nature herself operates.... Such a genuine concept of "imitation" affords a ground and justification for the boldest kinds of transposition, transfiguration, deformation, or recasting of natural appearances, in so far as they are the means to make the work manifest intuitively the *transapparent* (emphasis mine) reality which has been grasped by the artist."<sup>16</sup>

At this point in his text Maritain cites Rouault expressly.

What exactly was this world of Rouault, which his creative intuition turned into a *transapparent* reality? It was principally a world of human beings, of suffering and solitude, all victims of sin and evil. We might categorize them, and then consider each individually, as follows: the Poor and their oppressors, Clowns, Prostitutes, Refugees, and Christ. At Rouault's funeral Abbé Morel said that Rouault "touches evil with the greatest profundity, but also with the clearest purity."

13. Jacques Maritain, *Raison et Raisons: Essais détachés* (Paris: Egloff, 1947), chap. XI.

14. *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, no. 12 (November, 1985), p. 24.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

16. Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), pp. 224-5.



## Poor and Their Oppressors

First, we see the injustices perpetrated by the legal system, the judges and the lawyers:

Plate LII: *Dura lex, sed lex* (The law is hard, but it is the law)

Some of the engravings in the “Miserere” were made in series, often as illustrations of one of Rouault’s poems. The following is just such a case: (This is my translation of the poem)

The condemned man went away  
Indifferent and weary.  
His lawyer in hollow  
Pompous phrases  
Proclaimed his total innocence.  
A red-robed prosecutor  
Held society blameless  
And indicted the accused man  
Under a Jesus on the cross  
Forgotten there.

Plate XVII: *Le condamné s'en est allé* (The condemned man went away).

Plate XIX: *Son avocat en phrases creuses clame sa totale innocence* (His lawyer in hollow pompous phrases proclaimed his total innocence).

Plate XX: *Sous un Jésus en croix, oublié là* (Under a Jesus on the cross, forgotten there).

There is no red-robed prosecutor here, but elsewhere Rouault did paint some red-robed judges. In the case of these judges and lawyers, Rouault’s intention seems to have been, not so much to condemn, as to lament the situation and point out the complicity of us all (see *Ne sommes-nous pas forcés?*—Are we not all condemned to hard labor?). It is the same with the next group of Rouault’s oppressors, the complacent rich and the self-satisfied bourgeoisie.

Plate XVI: *Dame du haut quartier croit prendre pour le ciel place réservée* (A lady from a chic neighborhood thinks she has purchased her reserved seat in heaven).



Plate LII Dura lex, sed lex



Plate XVII La condamné s'en est allé



Plate XIX Son avocat en phrases creuses  
clame sa totale innocence...



Plate XX Sous un Jésus en croix oublié là

Plate XL: *Face à face* (Face to face).

See also *Des ongles et du bec* (With beak and claw), *Nous croyant rois* (Believing ourselves kings), *Plus le coeur est noble, moins le col est roide* (The more noble the heart, the less stiff the neck), and *Loin du sourire de Reims* (A far cry from the smile at Reims). The *Sourire de Reims* refers to the smile on the face of an angel in the Cathedral of Reims.

Then there are “the poor” themselves—in their helplessness, suffering and loneliness:

Plate XXV: *Jean-François jamais ne chante alleluia* (Jean-François never sings alleluia).

And the working poor: on one occasion, the sight of a poor butcher at work in his butcher shop on wheels as it passed down the street sent Rouault back to his studio to paint. See also *Le dur métier de vivre* (The hard job of just getting through life) and *Vie d'embûches et de malices* (Life is full of ambushes and acts of malice).

In the next plate we encounter the destitute who survive only through comradeship and compassion:

Plate LV: *L'aveugle parfois console le voyant* (Sometimes the blind console those who see).

Maritain wrote that there was in Rouault, “like a spring of living water, an intense religious sentiment, the stubborn faith of a hermit ... which made him discover the image of the divine Lamb in all the abandoned and rejected for whom he felt a profound pity.”<sup>17</sup> By identifying with the poor, as Maritain suggested in “Exister avec le peuple,” Rouault identifies with their sufferings.

Plate XXXII: *Seigneur, c'est vous, je vous reconnais!* (My Lord, it's you, now I recognize You!).

## Clowns

The next general category is clowns. Individual paintings were often the result of a single moving experience. Maritain says that the basis of Rouault's painting is “the most profound and severe emotion,” a “primitive

17. Jacques Maritain, *Frontières de la Poésie*, p. 132.



Plate XVI Dame du haut quartier croit prendre  
pour le ceil place réservée



Plate XL Face à face



Plate XXV Jean-François jamais  
ne chante alleluia ...



Plate LV L'aveugle parfois a consolé le voyant

emotion" in the face of "the truth of the things that move him," as in the case of the butcher. In this case, it was the sight of a traveling circus entering town. Later he took to spying on the circus people as they set up in the *Place Grenelle* after the parade or as they prepared to move on after the show. It was the world of Puccini's *Pagliaccio*, of Fellini's lonely circus strongman in *La Strada*, a world that led the great American clown, Emmet Kelly, to declare that the profession of the clown is the saddest profession in the world.

Plate VIII: *Qui ne se grime pas* (Who of us does not put on whiteface). See also Rouault's paintings *Le vieux clown* (*The Old Clown*), and *Clown*. As with the poor, clowns too often survived only through companionship and tenderness.

### Prostitutes

The third general category is the prostitutes, or as the French say "Filles de joie," (daughters of joy), a term that comes from the Old Testament. Prostitution was a legally sanctioned enterprise in France at this time, and in the "Maisons closes" or legal brothels, the daughters of joy had to submit periodically to degrading medical examinations to protect the clients. In the Realist School of painting, prostitutes were often portrayed with a kind of cynicism and complicity, as in Manet's *Olympe* and Toulouse-Lautrec's *Examen médicale*. To Toulouse-Lautrec's cynicism, Rouault opposed tears of rage. In Rouault's nudes there is no sensual relish in decadence for its own sake. Again, it was often a single moving experience that drove him to paint. A single glance was enough to open for him an entire universe of emotional reality. He knew of the poor street-walkers in his *faubourg* who, in winter, posed for artists in the nude without pay, solely for the privilege of warming themselves in the painters' studios. The moving experience in this case was an encounter with an older, shop-worn prostitute, grotesquely made up, who, with a forced smile, propositioned him from a doorway near his home.

Plate XIV: *Fille dite de joie* (A daughter of joy, as the expression goes).

Rouault's prostitutes are not objects of man's desire, but debased, suffering creatures made in God's image. There is no joy. For him there were no "happy hookers" who succeeded in marrying their rich clients to live happily ever after, like Julia Roberts in the film "Pretty Woman." He portrays,



Plate XXXII Seigneur, c'est vous, je vous reconnais!



Plate VIII Qui ne se grime pas



Plate XIV Fille dite de joie



Plate LIV Debout les morts

not the error of sin, but the pain of sin. There is a kind of hardness and resentful resignation in the faces of his brutalized prostitutes. See also his paintings *Filles au fourneau* (prostitutes in the "display" room) and his other paintings of prostitutes.

### Refugees

The next category is refugees—the victims of war, poverty and famine.

Plate LIV: *Debout les morts* (Up on your feet, you dead).

See also *Les ruines elle-mêmes ont péri* (The ruins themselves have perished), *Bella matribus detestata* (Wars detested by mothers), and *Mon doux pays, où êtes-vous?* (My sweet homeland, where are you?).

### Christ

Finally there is the category of Christ—the human Christ rather than Christ in his divinity. The painter seems preoccupied with the sufferings and the eternal presence of Christ in the person of the poor, rather than with His death. Here is another series meant to be viewed together. The three subtitles make up one sentence.

Plate II: *Jésus honni ...* (Jesus, mocked ...).

Plate III: *Toujours flagellé ...* (Forever scourged ...).

Plate IV: *Se réfuge en ton coeur, va nu-pieds de malheur* (Takes refuge in your heart, oh barefoot waif of misfortune).

In all his portrayals of the Redeemer, what stands out is the impassivity of Christ's face. There seems to be a total lack of aggressiveness. See also *C'est par ses meurtrissures que nous sommes guéris* (It is by His wounds that we are healed), *Et Véronique au tendre lin passe encore sur le chemin* (And Veronica with her tender linen still passes along the way), and *Il a été maltraité et il n'a pas ouvert la bouche* (He was mistreated and He never opened his mouth).

William A. Dyrness noted that when Rouault painted his Christs in color, he painted them in the same colors as his clowns and prostitutes.<sup>18</sup>

18. William Dyrness, *Rouault: A Vision of Suffering and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 185.



Plate II Jésus honni ...



Plate III Toujours flagellé ...



Plate IV Se réfuge en ton coeur  
va nu-pieds de malheur

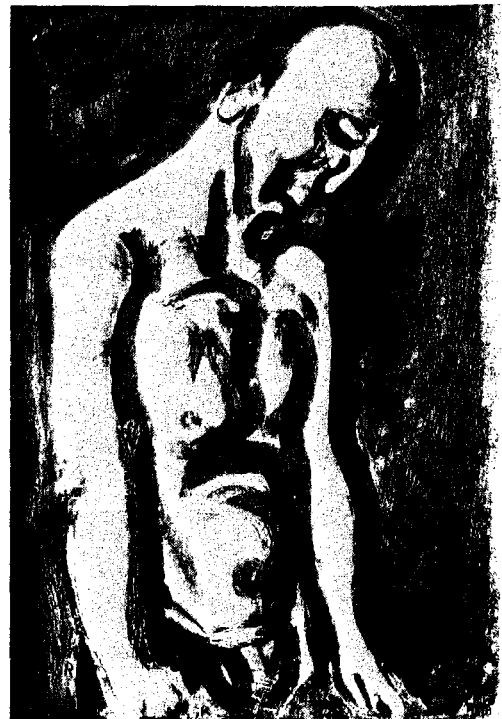


Plate XXXV Jésus sera en agonie jusqu' à  
la fin du monde ...



Dyrness noted also that whatever the outward aspects of Christ's earthly identification as human may be (see his painting *Ecce homo*—Behold the Man), this identification finds its “basis and justification for Rouault [in] Christ's espousal of human suffering ... Christ's presence is a presence of suffering in and with our suffering,”<sup>19</sup> especially with the sufferings of the least of His brethren. “Whatsoever you do unto these the least of my brethren, you do unto me.” Consequently:

*Plate XXXV: Jésus sera en agonie jusqu'à la fin du monde* (Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world).

See also *Aimez-vous les uns les autres* (Love one another), and *Le juste comme le bois de santal parfume la hache qui le frappe* (The just man like sandal wood perfumes the axe that strikes him).

Georges Rouault has been called the last painter of Icons because of his simplicity of forms, the heavy but luminous colors, the gravity of tone, the eschewing of exact representational realism and the indistinctness of contours. Dyrness says of Rouault that, “if the image is less clean, it is more alive with a kind of spiritual energy.”<sup>20</sup>

The tone is indeed grave, but it is not one of all pervasive gloom. What is everywhere present is what Maritain called his “stubborn faith of a hermit,” his Bernanosian tenacious hope against hope. This hoped-for ideal is always there, either directly or by suggestion. See *Il arrive parfois que la route soit belle* (At times the road turns out to be beautiful), *Il serait si doux d'aimer* (It would be so sweet to love) and his paintings *Evasion* (Escape), *Paysage biblique* (Biblical landscape), *Paysage tragique* (Tragic landscape) and *le Christ et deux disciples* (Christ and two disciples).

*Plate XXIX: Chantez matines, le jour renaît* (Sing matins, for the new day is aborning).

It was an unwavering hope and an unshakeable faith in his Christ and in his artistic vision of a deeper spiritual reality, masked by the ugliness, horror and brutality of the sensible world around him, that led Rouault “a galley slave, [to row] hard, like a poor fisherman, against the currents on the ocean of human and pictorial turpitudes. ... To tell the truth, I painted in order to open, day and night, the eyelids of the sensible world, but closing them from time to time to better see my vision blossom fully and become

19. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 183.



Plate XXIX Chantez matines, le jour renaît

more ordered.” This is what led his daughter Isabelle to say: “The ultimate feeling that Rouault had about his own person and the sign by which he recognized its reality seems to me to have been joy.” “It is also the joy of having endowed disinherited beings with beauty and power.”<sup>21</sup> So like Gerard Manley Hopkins, Rouault could sing Matins with each daybreak:

... though the last lights off the black West went  
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink, eastward springs—  
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
 World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings.  
 (God's Grandeur)

Rouault was a “loner.” The profound joy he experienced came from his intimate association with his family and a very few fast friends like André Suarès and Jacques Maritain. If he cultivated very limited relationships with his contemporaries, it was not out of disdain, but because of the impossibility to communicate with them except on the level of a profound artistic and human solidarity,<sup>22</sup> and this was precisely the level on which he could communicate with Maritain. The two shared many things: a kind of pristine, childlike innocence, an enlightened sensitivity to beauty, a profound solidarity with the poor, the downtrodden and the disinherited of the earth, a thirst for justice, and a profound religious sentiment. On all of these matters they could communicate on an intimate basis and they did so.

What Maritain brought to Rouault was intimacy, warmth, understanding and encouragement. But it is doubtful that Rouault would have painted differently had he never met Maritain. What Rouault brought to Maritain was a sharpening of his artistic sensitivity, an intellectual liberation from the smothering constraints of his spiritual and intellectual guides at the time of his conversion. Without Rouault, we may never have known *Art and Scholasticism* and all the luminous works that followed.

21. *Giuseppe Marchiori*, *Georges Rouault* (Paris/Lausanne: Bibliothèque des Arts, 1965). From the last unnumbered pages of commentary on the illustrations included in the book.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 30.