



## Letter From French America

by Russell Desmond

### Francophobia on the Right

Several years ago in Paris I was surprised to find young pamphleteers outside the Hôtel de Ville (or "Chateau Chirac" as an acquaintance would say) shouting out, "Down with the bearded, sold-out socialists!" When I told friends at home, they seemed incredulous. After Reagan bombed Libya I remember that the people of England and West Germany, our supposed allies, demonstrated in the streets against us. The French people—despite the complaints of Mitterrand's government—did not. After the first revelations of Reagan's dealing with Iran, two young Frenchwomen, otherwise inclining typically to the left, told me, "We were not surprised; nor were we disappointed." So many times I see evidence of French affinities with American policies go unnoticed, unreported—I often wonder, for instance, why there is not more talk among American conservatives about Raymond Aron's subtle attacks on the Annales school of historians, or about Etienne Mantoux's denunciation of Keynes.

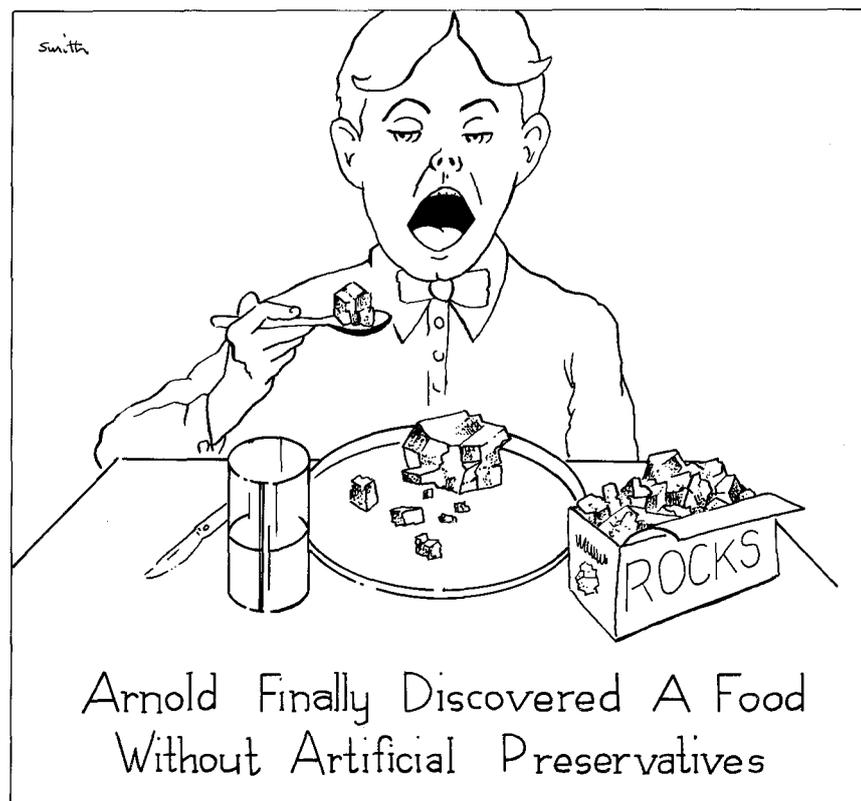
Part of the problem lies in fundamental differences in temperament. We "Anglo-Saxons" (in De Gaulle's endearing phrase) who are shocked at the proliferation of nudity on the Côte d'Azur probably cannot imagine how horrified the French are at our tolerance of episodes of public drunkenness! French political thought is inextricably entwined around their intensely factional politics—a territory particularly forbidding to outsiders. It is a volatile, intricate kind of chess game entirely lacking the relative stability of our two-party system. I do not envy the student of history who seeks to disentangle the eight Wars of the

French Reformation, the 13 or so different French regimes which have followed 1789, or the more than 100 changes of cabinet of their Third Republic. Yet beneath this hotheaded surface rest continuities which are perhaps deeper than those we claim. This system provokes strange incongruities: Many Americans might be surprised to learn that J.J. Rousseau was adamantly *against* violent revolution or that the atheist Diderot admonished Boucher for the lack of morals in his paintings. Ironically, the "enemy of the Church," Ernest Renan, agreed with the positivist Taine and the socialist Jaurès that religion was a very important base of politics. The specific political affiliations which rendered such seemingly like-minded classical liber-

als as Sainte-Beuve, Constant, Thiers, Guizot, and Tocqueville political antagonists are almost indecipherable to us. Yet a consequence is paid. I, for instance, am convinced that Tocqueville's hostility to the July Monarchy has brought undue prejudice against his former professor, François Guizot, a man who virtually dominated half a century of French political thought. Guizot, the Protestant Prime Minister to King Louis Philippe, is still largely unknown to the English-speaking world.

Another difficulty is that French conservative thought—anti-Enlightenment and counterrevolutionary—is invariably allied with two institutions alien to the mainstream of the Anglo-American tradition: Roman Catholi-

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cism and the French monarchy. Without buying the entire *ultramontane* program, I would suggest that American conservatives could learn from the royalists' critiques of democracy in the same way John Adams versed himself in the history of traditional monarchies. Adams, the puritan second President of a republic, often found himself defending the monarchical Elder Daughter of the Church—of course he always looked with suspicion and disdain on the products of the Enlightenment in a way which would place him more in league with the old French right than with that part of Tocqueville who passionately defended the Enlightenment reformer Turgot (incidentally, conservatives finding Tocqueville's *mi-croyant* detachment a far cry from the flag-bearing traditionalism of Burke might discover a missing link in the writings of Alexis' teacher Royer-Collard). With his obsession with the issue of executive authority, Adams would have certainly admired De Gaulle's Fifth Republic presidency as a resolution of almost 100 years of French executive weakness. In many ways, the French president today is stronger and more freely

in command of his forces than ours: witness even the socialist Mitterrand sending 2,000 troops to Tchad with no one batting an eye.

A further difficulty which Americans encounter when examining French conservatism is a certain dizziness upon seeing the depths and extremes revealed beneath the surface. Although almost inconceivable to us, we might remember that the 31 attempted assassinations of De Gaulle did not originate in the political spectrum to his *left*. We "Anglo-Saxons" might also be astonished to discover an entire school of thought which considers our illustrious Magna Carta a scheming device by which ambitious nobles succeeded in weakening the power of the English sovereign before his enemies, much like the feudal revolt deceptively titled "the League of the Public Good," led by Charles the Bold against the crown of Louis XI. For a thousand years many Frenchmen have taken for granted the idea that their monarchy once provided a flawed but effective stabilizing and civilizing force in a Dark Age riddled with the vicissitudes of democratic mob rule. This view was put most cogently

in Maurras' piquant phrase, "The parliamentary system, according to Montesquieu a product of the Teuton forests, is a barbaric machine, too slow and too cumbersome . . . this Merovingian chariot must make way for the automobile."

The long shadow of this angry old man, Charles Maurras, hangs over the French conservative tradition of the past hundred years. His adversaries accuse him of fulfilling Sainte-Beuve's prophecy, "In France we shall remain Catholic long after we have ceased to be Christians." Yet those quick to remind us his writings were condemned by the Vatican in 1926 rarely go on to remember the ban was lifted in 1939. And with typical liberal duplicity, the French publishing house Gallimard has conspicuously refused to print his voluminous work in their plush *Pléiade* series, preferring to publish the work of such other noted anti-Semites as Voltaire and Céline. The disinterment of the French right from its lamentable postwar status will not occur until the exact nature of Maurras' collaboration with the Vichy government is reexamined. Anyone familiar with his writings knows that if

## REVISIONS

### Blurbs

James Dickey has written a new book, *Alnilam* (New York: Doubleday; \$19.95), and it is unclear why. Perhaps Dickey just had to prove himself by speaking—a wordless writer being too Zen to appeal to his common sense.

*Alnilam* is set in World War II (in which Dickey served as a fighter pilot) and describes the trials and tribulations of a Frank Cahill, recently blind from adult diabetes. Cahill also has a son, whom he has never seen and who is presumed dead, the victim of a mysterious Air Corps training accident. Fairly early on, however, it becomes apparent that both Cahill and his son are metaphorical (Life, Disease, Death, Sight, "On his Blindness," The Meaning of Manhood, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, shades of James Jones, *Top Gun*, all thickly

rolled together), as if Dickey has forgotten (for a short while, let us hope) that metaphors are supposed to conjure life, not the other way around.

Much of the book is quite simply repulsive: an invalid lady bather unstrapping her prosthetic leg while Cahill, the Peeping Tom proprietor of a public pool, masturbates behind a two-way mirror; Cahill, stepping into his own excrement, offers it to his sight-seeing dog, Zack, to sniff at, as proof of their shared spunk. Zack, a German Shepherd, 160 lbs. and growing, we can excuse; Dickey, a former football player, poet, celebrity, we cannot.

What the world is like, we may never know. Yet, to divide it between *light* and *dark* (Dickey's unique, screenplay device, the *dark* column set off in bold type) is to recall Mani the Persian; it would

not be inconceivable to have the next Dickey fiction set in Aztec Mexico, with the main character being a kidnapped and castrated Viking, impressed into the chest-ripping priestly class. After all, Cahill's mythical son, Joel, leader of a sinister Nordic cult, is not a far cry from that.

Writers of celebrity (if not of stature) have an obligation to words. Diabetes is a debilitating disease—to depict it in graphic detail in order to confront us with our own latent (or galloping) debility (and the possibility of Redemption Through Suffering) is puerile. Dickey the poet, and the author of *Deliverance*, should have more reverence for the divine gift of language. When words lose their value, the world pales, and no amount of sniffing can bring it back.

there was one ethnic group Maurras distrusted *more* than the Jews, it was the Germans. He moved his newspaper to a nonoccupied zone of France and continually criticized the Nazis throughout the war. And his political dream, based on decentralized, autonomous regional governments with a benevolent monarchical head in Paris, had nothing in common with the totalitarianism of Hitler's henchmen. Although history proved him wrong, he sincerely believed that De Gaulle's rebels would bring a Communist takeover in France. Certainly, with the high percentage of Communists in the Resistance in the South of France, where the memory of the war between Catholics and Communists in Spain was very vivid, there was some justification for his fears. Most Americans—having never lost a war on our home ground and believing the French cowardly lost theirs with Germany after four days and not, as is more accurate, after 70 years of bloodletting—will never understand the tragedy of those years of civil war in France, symbolized so vividly by De Gaulle's painful decision to wage war against the name-sake and godfather of his own son, Marshal Pétain. Nor will we see the analogy of Pétain to Robert E. Lee. Would not Lee have condemned the resurgent Ku Klux Klan as anarchists the way Maurras condemned the Resistance as Communists? Even those less forgiving towards Maurras must admit the strong parallels of his decentralizing policies with those of a Southern statesman like John C. Calhoun. For that matter, were not Maurras' Provençal *félibres* somehow akin to our own homespun Southern agrarians? Is there not a certain parallel between the patriotic, populist writings of a *camelot du roi* like Bernanos and the writings of a man like Donald Davidson, both trying desperately to keep alive the best of the old world and the new? Witness the youthful Bernanos' indictment of the pacifist philosopher Alain, "When the blood of young Frenchmen is flowing everywhere, it is not to an obscure sophist like yourself that the mothers will hold up their immolated sons." Or the older Bernanos' honest efforts at expunging the taint of anti-Semitism from French traditionalism, "I am only 'racist' in the manner in which I affirm that

there *are* races . . . that racism of the German Nazis or the American KKK has always been, for a Frenchman, a disgusting monstrosity."

Robert Speaight, Bernanos' biographer, hits a visionary cue when he says, "Bernanos, like Brückberger, was more an antique Trojan than a Greek." Following the example of the courtly, chivalric tradition of Aeneas on through to France's gift of Roman traditions and civil law might prove useful to a country like ours, sweating and struggling beneath the excesses of a precedent-ridden Anglo-Saxon legal system. "The weakness and frailty of a constitution are in exact proportion to the number of constitutional provisions that are written" (Joseph de Maistre). Who knows? Perhaps the French kings had the right idea in calling their legislative body only in emergencies, wars, famines, and the like—instead of paying a bunch of full-time politicians/lawyers year-in and year-out to think up more and more unnecessary laws. "The state will never leave go of what it once has taken" (Bernanos).

*Russell Desmond writes from New Orleans.*

## Letter From Hollywood

by *Father Andrew L.J. James*

### *Take 'Em to Court!*

Americans are said to be a litigious people. So powerful is our desire to justify ourselves that there is even a man who was willing to let himself be called a thief and a liar in front of millions of people, rather than pay me \$60 for an article he had pirated.

It started this way: I read through *Writer's Market*, 1984, and found the name of a religious publication which claims it wants "exposés," and not any "All's well with Christ" manuscripts. Since they seemed to want to be trendier than thou, I decided theirs would be a good magazine to send an article about the establishment of an Eastern Orthodox ministry at Chillicothe Correctional Institute, in central Ohio. They seemed to like the article too;

they published it, but as a letter to the editor!

Since I have routinely placed the words "Copyright, date, all rights reserved" on material which I have submitted for publication for pay—which would protect the matter in question, until such time a magazine would offer "First North American serial rights" payment—the editor had not just been ethically unconscionable but had broken the law.

I wrote him to say, "If you thought my material was worthy of publication, you should have paid me. If you thought it unworthy, you should have rejected it. You did neither."

He lamely responded: "We gave you credit for it." He would make the same remark (with the editorial addition of the adjective "full" in an appropriate place) to Judge Wapner at the hearing: "We gave him full credit for it," meaning they published my name as the author.

I demanded payment. The editor refused. I took up the matter with the California Attorney General's Office. They contacted the editor, who indicated to them he would make amends. He did nothing.

I sued the gentleman in the small claims court, in Fullerton, California. Before long, I received a telephone call from one of the producers of *The People's Court*, who invited me to appear on the show. "I would be willing," I said, "to call them thieves and liars in front of millions of other people, but I expect they will not want that."

But they did. I flew to California, where Tim Owen (an aspiring actor from Ohio who works as a production assistant for Ralph Edwards Productions) picked me up at Burbank and hustled me into Hollywood to the studio.

The plane was an hour and a half late; they were already filming one segment when we arrived. The defendant peeked at me from behind a screen. One of the producers said: "Keep talking. Talkers tend to win." No matter what Judge Wapner decided, I had won. I had brought the miscreants to "justice," even if it was the sort only Hollywood can provide.

The Judge heard both sides, then went out for the commercial break saying: "I'll be back and give you my