

Sacred Dread: Raïssa Maritain, the Allure of Suffering, and the French Catholic Revival (1905–1944). By Brenna Moore. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2013. Pp. xiii + 293. \$30.

The Way: Russian Thinkers of the Orthodox Emigration and Their Journal, 1925–1940. By Antoine Arjakovksy. Translated from the French by Jerry Ryan. Edited by John A. Jillions and Michael Plekon. Foreword by Rowan Williams. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2013. Pp. xiv + 784. \$65.

In his memoir, *Witches' Sabbath*, writer Maurice Sachs, an agnostic Jew briefly converted to Catholicism, remembers his godmother:

Raïssa Oumançof came straight from the Russia that prepared the Revolution. Had Marxism attracted her instead of Catholicism, had Hegel triumphed over Aquinas, and Lenin over Paul, had she preferred *The Possessed* to Bloy's *La Femme Pauvre*, had loved Thorez rather than Maritain, what a militant for the party this woman of steel would have made! (108)

Sachs was alternately a protégé of André Gide, Jean Cocteau, and Coco Chanel. His travels brought him from the Parisian demimonde to the seminary to eventual death in a Nazi concentration camp, probably at the hands of fellow inmates. But in the mid-1920s he glimpsed the divine in a salon in Meudon that brought together the Old Testament and the New, the Russian emigration and the Catholic Revival.

Raïssa Maritain (1883–1960) is best known as the wife of philosopher Jacques Maritain. In *Sacred Dread* Moore reintroduces her as a key figure in France's late 19th- and early 20th-century *renouveau catholique*. The Catholic Revival is remembered for celebrated conversions (Cocteau), signal contributions to literature and the arts (Paul Claudel, Georges Bernanos, Georges Rouault), and, above all, a “suffering-centered *imaginaire*” (3) that stood as a sign of contradiction in secular, positivist, republican France (68). This Catholic perspective on suffering arguably still signifies cultural contradiction. Part of M.'s purpose in writing this monograph is to resist a tendency among scholars to relegate women such as Raïssa Maritain, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Simone Weil “to the ranks of the pathetic and the bizarre” (7).

M. traces the Russian-Jewish-born Raïssa Maritain's life from the eve of her and her husband's conversion in Belle Époque Montmartre to the end of a World War II exile in America. After being driven nearly to despair by the arid positivism of the Sorbonne, she and Jacques sought Catholic baptism in 1906 with novelist Léon Bloy as their godfather. Raïssa was fascinated by Bloy's fixation on female and Jewish abjection, and both Maritains were intrigued by his complex and controversial philo-Semitism that combined solemn veneration with vituperative scorn. Between the wars, the Maritains' openness to Judaism, Russian Orthodoxy, and the artistic and literary avant-garde made their suburban home both a center for spiritual retreats and a vibrant salon presided over by Raïssa, whose own gift for poetry was encouraged by Cocteau and inspired in part by Marc Chagall.

Yet Raïssa continually battled serious illnesses, and her dramatic suffering and accompanying visions led Jacques and others to hold her in reverential awe. As M. articulates it, her “frail and powerful” (93) body became “the site where the divine entered and acted, a power that could be felt and appreciated by those around her” (74). M. challenges other scholars who have relegated Maritain’s bodily and spiritual torture to the category of vicarious suffering by pointing out how Raïssa and others understood this experience as more mystically revelatory than redemptive of others. Raïssa also suffered as she lamented the mounting aggression of the Third Reich, her optimism about interfaith understanding and democratic freedom giving way to the horror of war and the dimming of hope.

M. offers a detailed and perceptive analysis of Raïssa’s wrenching Holocaust poetry, written in wartime exile in New York and displaying an unprecedented anger at God. She contrasts these poems with Raïssa’s glowing memoirs from the time, *We Have Been Friends Together* (1942) and *Adventures in Grace* (1945), that established her reputation in the United States and invited American Catholics into the lost world of the *renouveau catholique*. In these best-selling books, Raïssa also reimagined her Russian-Jewish childhood in a way that helped Catholics “relate easily to these stories of ascetic sainthood and a rich liturgical sensorium” (161). *Sacred Dread* is both a historically informed and theologically acute account of Raïssa Maritain’s poetry, mysticism, and friendships, and takes its place along with Stephen Schloesser’s *Jazz Age Catholicism* (2005) as an indispensable study of a luminous moment in the history of 20th-century Catholicism.

Arjakovsky similarly reveals a historical-theological site replete with memories of spiritual fellowship and intellectual ferment. He examines the “mytho-logical” heart of modernist Russian Orthodox thought, or the “Judeo-Christian myth of divine humanity” (30) that inspired among *The Way’s* disparate writers “a common will toward a new interpretation of religious doctrine within the bosom of Orthodoxy” (34). The story of the journal (known in Russian as *Put’*) begins with the almost mythical account of the two Philosophers’ Ships on which the Soviet government transported approximately 160 Orthodox intellectuals—including Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Semyon Frank, Ivan Ilyin, and Nikolai Lovvsky—out of Russia in 1922. By the mid-1920s, a constellation of authors gathered around Berdyaev and his Parisian journal, sharing a vision of the “churching of life” (65) and also the “eschatological sentiment of belonging to the end of the Constantinian period” (99).

A. offers as much a story of disparity as commonality, however, since *The Way’s* writers were deeply affected by monarchist-republican tensions within the Russian émigré community, as well as the 1927 schism in the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia. For a time in the late 1920s, the Eurasianist movement found a place within the pages of the journal, its proponents arguing that Russia embodied a distinct culture neither European nor Asian, and one whose mystical soul could hold a more fruitful conversation with Buddhism than with Roman Catholicism. The drift of some of the Eurasianists toward what A. terms national socialism and

Berdyaev's scathing critique of Eurasianism's lack of universalism led to a break with Nikolai Trubetskoy and other proponents of a Russo-centric cosmology. By the 1930s, the publication became an increasingly antinationalist journal, and a number of its authors—including Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky—participated in the ecumenical movement of the interwar years. Indeed, this predominantly Orthodox journal owed its continued existence to the financial support of the YMCA and, to a lesser extent, the Anglican Church.

In the early 1930s, Berdyaev and several of the journal's other authors, who had already influenced French Catholic intellectuals such as Jacques Maritain (whose Meudon gatherings Berdyaev frequented), shared a common vision with the burgeoning generation of Non-Conformist intellectuals such as Emmanuel Mounier, founder of the literary magazine *Esprit*. The Non-Conformists sought a post-ideological Third Way, neither right nor left, that identified the malaise of the 1930s as profoundly spiritual and advocated a personalist philosophy. Berdyaev's home at Clamart also served as the venue for a monthly Catholic–Orthodox seminar; among its participants was the Dominican Yves Congar, author of *Chrétiens désunis: Principes d'un 'oecuménisme' catholique* (1937).

Just as the coming of World War II spelled the end of the Maritains' Meudon circle, *The Way* also entered its twilight period in the late 1930s. Bulgakov's condemnation (leveled by Metropolitan Sergius in Moscow) for sophiological heresy in 1935 divided both the Russian Orthodox émigré community as a whole and the theologians at Paris's St. Sergius Institute, a school of theology closely associated with the journal. Bulgakov was exonerated by a diocesan assembly in Paris in 1937, but the journal's theological center began to give way as the anthropocentric (Berdyaev), sophiocentric (Bulgakov), and theocentric (Lev Shestov, himself a Jew drawn to Kierkegaard) positions of key authors hardened, and the prevailing spirit was “the desire to crush an intellectual opponent” (465). The journal ceased publication after March 1940, the German Army entering Paris three months later.

These two books both explore in rewarding depth the ways theology, philosophy, art, literature, and politics were influenced by crosscultural contacts in the French capital in the 1920s and 1930s. While both monographs are very well researched, A.'s book is less likely than M.'s to serve as an accessible introduction to a community and its culture. The pages of *The Way* presuppose the reader's familiarity with not only better-known literary and philosophical figures such as Fyodor Dostoevsky and Vladimir Solovyov but also myriad lesser luminaries and their works. One will need to have a certain preliminary context to understand, for example, a fleeting reference to “the lethargy of Oblomov” (257). That said, A.'s book provides what Archbishop Rowan Williams in his introduction calls “a masterful survey” (viii), and offers further evidence that in the realm of the spirit, interwar Paris was indeed a city of light.

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