

## ***SOME MEMORIES OF JACQUES MARITAIN***

Armand Maurer, c.s.b.

I first met Maritain at a gathering of staff and students of the Institute in the classroom in the Institute's basement (now the Publication Department). It was a Friday afternoon tea. I asked him a question about analogy (a lively subject at the time) and he gave me a helpful answer. I was impressed with his warm and gentle manner. His eyes seemed to envelop you and hold you in their gaze. The softness of his skin made me think of the old saying that intellectuals are *mollis carne*. We were all in awe of him, having just heard him lecture, and we were eager to meet him in person.

Maritain came at intervals to deliver brief courses in philosophical topics, unlike Gilson who spent a whole term with us. One of his series of lectures I most vividly recall, and of which I made copious notes, was on the natural law. My notes are dated December 4-9, 1950. Maritain was an outstanding lecturer, with his materials well organized and forcefully presented. He liked to use diagrams, which helped to clarify his ideas. Listening to him, I recall my emotion as I realized that I was experiencing that rarity: a philosopher who was actually philosophizing - "doing philosophy," as we now say. On the natural law he was drawing upon Thomism, but rethinking the doctrine in a new way, showing that moral principles are known first of all, not by concepts but by the basic inclinations of our nature. He approached the notion of the natural law historically, emphasizing the progressive awareness of its demands through the ages.

Maritain brought to the Institute and St. Michael's College a new appreciation of philosophy which, along with the inspiration of Etienne Gilson, has become part of our heritage. These were intellectual giants; but they were also Catholics, and they left us with the conviction that philosophical reason is compatible with the Faith; indeed, that Faith enhances reason.

Both Gilson and Maritain were deeply spiritual, each in his own way. When Maritain was here, there was a convent of contemplative nuns (Sister Adorers of the Precious Blood) on St. Joseph Street, where the Kelly Library now stands. It

was not unusual to see Maritain in their chapel for long periods, always wearing his large scarf around his neck. Everyone knew him by that scarf: it was his signature.

Maritain was very sensitive to the cold, and one winter he became sick while living in Windle House. For fear of pneumonia it was decided to send him to the hospital. His room was indeed cold: he did not know how to turn the radiator on. After that frightening experience Raissa put her foot down and did not let him come back to Canada.

I do not remember seeing Raissa more than once. She was here with Vera on one occasion, when Maritain was lecturing in Teefy Hall. He gave the Natural Law lectures in Carr Hall.

Maritain's English was not very good, but we had no difficulty understanding him. Fr. Phelan went over his lectures with him and helped to improve his pronunciation. In one lecture the word "machine" caused him difficulty. When reading the lecture to Fr. Phelan he pronounced it "makine" with a long "i." Fr. Phelan had him repeat it correctly several times, and he got it right during the lecture. But then he hesitated and said "pardon me, makine."

At the Canadian border Maritain sometimes had trouble with the emigration authorities because he lacked some needed paper. They got to know him. Once I drove Gilson to Cornell to give a lecture and he too had trouble at the border. While negotiations were going on and the name "Gilson" was spoken, an officer sitting in the back of the room came forward and asked Gilson "How is my friend Maritain?"

The last time Maritain and Gilson were together in Toronto they were guests at a gathering of the staff of the Institute in the President's office. They were sitting side by side and I was not far away, trying to hear their conversation. They were discussing the problem of Christian philosophy, and Gilson leaned over to Maritain and said (if my memory is correct): "Jacques, we are fundamentally in agreement on the subject, but I am more and more seeing it from a theological point of view, and you from a rational point of view." I think this is shown in the additions Gilson made to the sixth edition of his *Le Thomisme*, in which he insists on the salutary role of theology in Thomistic philosophy, whereas Maritain (while agreeing that faith "*elevates reason in its own order*") preferred to stress the rational development of philosophy.