region unless we destroy much of what stands today. We cannot permit the existence of a state in Palestine, or a state in Iraq. We shall strive to destroy the state in all the lands of the Arabs and the Muslims. For the state, with its modern features, with its laws and its constitution, its parliament and its human rights, and its separation of powers and its devotion to development, could lead to human fulfillment, and such an outcome we shall not allow.

Our foolish rivals among the intellectuals speak of moderates and extremists in our camp. I say to them, ‘You fools, have you seen among our ranks anyone who believes in the legitimacy of the modern state?’ You believe in scientific research and think tanks. Take everything these so-called moderates say by way of speeches and sermons and pamphleteering, and you will easily discover that no one among them believes in the modern state. They, like us, want to destroy the present order of things and to arrive at a new reality that makes no room for joy or for hotel weddings. We each have our code, each sheik or preacher has his own way and method. The proof is that when the extremists among us kill sixty people, they, the moderate Islamists, step to the microphone to announce that they condemn this criminal act—but just as the listener is about to be reassured, they pronounce that we should not be talking about sixty people while forgetting the thousands killed by the Americans in Iraq, that we should not forget those killed by Ariel Sharon everyday. Nor should we forget the victims killed by Hulagu, the Mongol invader. Then our moderates end with the all-time favorite song among the Arabs, the one that goes: ‘All those bloody events will come to an end with the destruction of Israel.’

Joseph Frank
Medieval Modernism

Jacques and Raïssa Maritain: Beggars for Heaven
By Jean-Luc Barré
Translated by Bernard E. Doering
(University of Notre Dame Press, 492 pp., $50)

Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919–1933
By Stephen Schloessner
(University of Toronto Press, 449 pp., $58)

The name of Jacques Maritain is unlikely to arouse in present-day American readers what Edmund Wilson once called “the shock of recognition,” the thrill of excitement that marks an important intellectual encounter. In his own country, though, Maritain’s life and work is still capable of provoking a great deal of interest. This first full-length biography of the neo-Thomist philosopher and his agonizingly pious wife Raïssa, Jewish by origin but a Catholic convert, ran through three printings in three years and won the Prix de la Biographie of the Académie Française. Their lives spanned the period running from the Dreyfus case in 1894 to the death of Jacques Maritain in 1973. And since they had been involved, personally and intellectually, in all the agitations of this momentous period in both French and world history, this account of their lives offers a fascinating panorama of the clashing ideas and ideals that still echo in our own time.

Jacques Maritain was an extremely complex and contradictory personality, a man with a disarming charm who always seemed to embody a somewhat subversive version of whatever cause he was espousing. A resolute partisan of the ideas of Thomas Aquinas, he refused to confine them to the past and used them to defend the most extreme experiments of modern art. When he taught in the United States, he was considered to be a “Catholic Marxist.” And he was perhaps the only important French intellectual since Tocqueville who ever wrote anything positive about the United States—in Reflections on America, published in 1958—without overlooking its problems and its deficiencies. The issue that preoccupied him throughout his life, the relation of religion, culture and politics, has recently taken on a new acuity, particularly in the United States, and thus history has given a renewed relevance to the flood of writings with which he analyzed this question from every conceivable point of view.

Jean-Luc Barré’s and Stephen Schloessner’s books supplement each other very neatly. Barré’s biography deals largely with the personal lives of the Maritains, and while not neglecting the artistic and cultural background it treats them only allusively and sketchily. While this context is sufficient for a French reader, it is likely that an American may well desire more information on, for example, such figures as Charles Péguy and Léon Bloy. Schloessner’s book, a lively and impressively erudite evocation of le renouveau catholique, the Catholic renaissance that occurred in France during the years after World War I, fills in this gap nicely. Maritain played a very important part in this renaissance, and the book devotes two chapters to him and Raïssa. It also contains sections on the painter Georges Rouault, the novelist Georges Bernanos, and the organist and composer Charles Tournemire, whose work was inspired by the plainchant of the Middle Ages. Many of the figures with whom Maritain was deeply involved are vividly evoked by Schloessner in more explanatory historical detail, and the same is true of Maritain’s philosophical ideas as well as the social and political background of the period.

Jacques Maritain came from a family deeply involved in French politics, and his grandfather, who had been a noted opponent of Napoleon III, was a member of the government that made peace with Bismarck and mercilessly suppressed the Paris Commune. His mother, Geneviève Favré, who converted to Protestantism, was politically active in progressive causes and became a close friend of Romain Rolland. Of her two children by an unhappy marriage leading to divorce, her son Jacques was raised as a Protestant, while his sister Jeanne received a Catholic upbringing.

The earliest years of Maritain’s edu-

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cation remain something of a mystery, and Barré notes that on this point “his silence was quite resolute.” But it is known that he and his sister were confined to a Protestant minister, Jean Réville, a specialist in the history of religions who taught at the École des Hautes Études in Paris and eventually at the Collège de France. This early schooling in Protestantism may well have contributed to the streak of independence and unconventionality that Maritain always exhibited.

As an adolescent, Maritain became deeply involved in the agitation over the Dreyfus case, and “at about thirteen or fourteen I had become a socialist. The articles of Jaurès... set me on fire.” Jean Jaurès, a founder of the Socialist Party in France, was passionately in defense of the falsely convicted Captain Dreyfus; but he was not an advocate of the violent destruction of capitalism by revolution. The walls of young Jacques’s room now became covered with incendiary slogans, and he would repair to the kitchen to read Jaurès’s newspaper in the company of the family cook and particularly of her husband, real proletarians whose company allowed him to escape his own bourgeois world, which he had come to feel was based on injustice. Barré remarks quite justly that “Maritain... would never deviate from the commitments of his youth, unrelenting toward the established order and a violent critique of bourgeois values”—though for many years this criticism was couched in right-wing terms rather than the left-wing slogans of his youth.

The life of Jacques Maritain was decisively changed when he met Raïssa Oumanoff at the Sorbonne, where they both were students. Her Russian-Jewish family had emigrated to France precisely to escape the limitations imposed on Jewish students in their previous homeland. The first encounter of the two, which she recounts in her memoir Les Grandes Amitiés, occurred when “a young man with a gentle countenance” approached her after class and asked her to join a protest movement “against the harsh treatment of which Russian socialist students were victims in their country.” They “soon became inseparable,” and took long walks during which “our conversations together were interminable.” In these exchanges of ideas, “we had to rethink the entire universe, the meaning of life, the fate of man, the justice and injustice of societies.” Both were studying science, not philosophy or religion, but the issues raised by the Dreyfus case had now provoked such questions for the members of the younger generation who were not, as Jacques wrote in a letter, part of “that ocean of dissolute and ignoble iniquity of capitalist dwarfs and daddy’s boys.”

Jacques’s closest friend at this time was Ernest Psichari, the grandson of the great historian of religion Ernest Renan, whose extremely influential works were devoted both to the origins of Christianity and to the history of the Hebrew people. Renan had reverentially depicted Jesus as one of the sublimest examples of humanity, but refused to accept him as a supernatural God. The atmosphere that Maritain encountered in the home of this family, as he wrote later in Antimoderne, was one “for which original sin and even the metaphysical misery of human nature were really non-existent and had never really happened. And in this way it was... basically anti-Christian.” The highly poetic letters that Maritain exchanged with Psichari, who later served with the army in North Africa and wrote a well-known novel exalting the military life, reveal their shared quasi-mystical response to nature, which they saw as “indefnable and completely laden with mystery and the shadows of the divine.” Barré remarks that the later Maritain already seems “fully present” in such an intuition; but “it was outside of God that his religious sentiment still found its foundation.”

The meeting with Raïssa provided Maritain with another interlocutor who shared such feelings, and for whom the sciences they were both studying provided no outlet. The dominant philosophy of the Sorbonne was “a calm and resolute materialism,” and even for a professor they admired, “life was reduced to a combination of chemicals and consciousness as an epiphenomenon.” They read Spinoza and Nietzsche, as Raïssa recalled, and admired both—Spinoza for “exhaling man to love God intellectually, without asking to be loved in return,” Nietzsche because of his “desperate passion for that truth whose death he set himself to proclaim.” But neither proved satisfactory, and, possessed by what they called “metaphysical vertigo,” they decided on one of their walks in 1901 that if they found no answer to the question of why life was worth living in a universe of misery and wickedness, they would commit suicide “before the force of our young years was worn out.”

A bulwark against total despair appeared in the person of Charles Pégy, a poet and essayist and one of the most ardent defenders of Dreyfus, and a friend of Jacques’s mother whose publications she helped to finance. Pégy was a socialist whose poetry was nonetheless filled with nationalistic fervor (one of his most important poems was a celebration of Jeanne d’Arc); and though he had broken with the official Catholic Church, he gradually—and privately, since his wife was bitterly anti-clerical—returned to the faith, viewing himself “as a maverick socialist in the revolutionary message of the Gospels.” Pégy’s bookshop was located on a street across from the Sorbonne, and the Cahiers de la Quinzaine, or Fortnightly Notebooks, that he published became an important Dreyfusard organ for younger progressive writers such as Romain Rolland. Jacques wrote him a long and angry letter quarreling with a criticism of Jaurès in the Cahiers, but the young neophyte was a faithful and attentive reader of the journal, and he never missed the weekly Thursday evening meetings in the bookshop.

It was also a weekly ritual to walk across the street with Pégy to attend the lectures of Henri Bergson at the Collège de France. Bergson used the latest results of scientific thought to argue that science itself was merely instrumental and pragmatic, and that reality could only be grasped by intuitive sympathy with the élan vital, the life force, of the endless flow of time. Bergson’s efforts to restate the freedom of the human personality in face of the reigning determinism served as a temporary

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stopgap for Jacques and Raïssa, as it did for so many others, by helping them to escape from their "existential anguish." "This Jewish philosopher," as Schloesser remarks, "was perhaps the main intellectual figure for Catholics during the high-water period of conversions after the Dreyfus Affair."

Jacques and Raïssa were soon to follow this path, and undergo conversion under the influence of Léon Bloy. He was a Christian novelist and publicist whose works were filled with furiously vitriolic and apocalyptic indignation against the injustices of bourgeois society. "For Bloy," as Schloesser explains, "those who suffer, especially those considered to be polluted figures by self-righteous society—for example, the prostitutes and the Jews—are redeemed in so far as they are participants in the ongoing Passion of Christ."

Moreover, they also redeem others, since Bloy's highest value was "vicarious suffering." He lived in extreme poverty, and Jacques and Raïssa sent him twenty-five francs out of the blue one day after reading one of his novels. A previous pamphlet, Salvation Through the Jews, which was published in 1896, provided a much more favorable vision of this people than that of the best-selling anti-Semitic tirades of Édouard Drumont. When it was reprinted in 1906, with the financial help of the Maritains, it was dedicated to Raïssa.

The two were married in November 1904, much to the dismay of Geneviève Favre, who resented the influence of Raïssa, "whom she never ceased to consider the manipulator of her son." During the next two years, under the influence of Bloy, they began to read the lives of the saints and martyrs; and when Raïssa was seriously ill in 1906, Jacques found himself praying on his knees that she recover. Urged on by Bloy, they decided to accept conversion, though they were so unfamiliar with Catholic rites that they thought he could baptize them himself. A notebook entry by Jacques for this year asserts that "Christians have abandoned the poor," and that ordinary Christians "fill me with horror." But he goes on: "With one's body present in this actual age of the world, one must live really with the first Christians, go back beyond all the Christians of the present time." He also remarks that Bloy is like a Jewish prophet, raging against his own people but still part of them all the same.

After their marriage the couple moved to Heidelberg, where Jacques had obtained a scholarship to study with Hans Driesch, a world-famous biologist whose work on embryos had stirred up a great deal of controversy. (It is surprising that his name has not been revived recently, because he argued that it was difficult to explain embryonic development except as the work of a superior intelligence, though he insisted that his researches were not opposed to Darwinism.) The two years they spent in Germany was a period of solitude, during which, on a visit to a monastery on the Isle of Wight, Jacques sought spiritual guidance and was told to consult a Dominican father, who profoundly influenced the couple until his death in 1914. It was he who advised them to read Thomas Aquinas.

Raïssa, "though she was already of the opinion that he was out of date and tiresome," nonetheless believed that the study of Aquinas might be of some help to Jacques. "Everything came to me through her," he wrote in 1908, describing his first acquaintance with the Summa Theologica, which "was a pure gift to me." He received once and for all certainty about the first truths concerning the intelligence and the joy of seeing that it was strong enough to lead the principles of reason into the very heart of the starry night of faith." This conviction that reason itself, as defined by Aristotle and Aquinas, did not come into irresolvable conflict with Christian faith then became the immutable cornerstone of Maritain's own philosophy.

The same priest who had recommended the reading of Aquinas also advised them to subscribe to the newspaper L'Action française, the journal of Charles Maurras, and they did so with that docile subservience to churchly authority that continued for far too many years and which casts an ineradicable shadow on their lives. Maurras himself cared nothing for religion. He dedicated his life to undoing the French Revolution. The most influential right-wing publicist of his time, he advocated the restoration of the monarchy and promulgated an extreme antidemocratic and anti-republican politics that continued to exercise its disastrous influence even as late as the Vichy regime and beyond. Maritain eventually not only established personal relations with him, but for fifteen years was an active collaborator on one of his satellite publications, La Revue universelle, to which he contributed regular columns.

This association with Maurras, who made no attempt (quite the contrary!) to disguise his anti-Semitism, was a terrible stain on the career of the Maritains, and proved a source of great embarrassment to them later. Barre treats it too gently and somewhat ironically, but even he wonders how they could have overlooked "the musty smell of anti-Semitism" that pervaded the writings of Maurras and his disciples. Raïssa feebly attempted to cope with this issue by recalling Jacques's exclusive preoccupation with philosophy and theology during these years and her own total absorption in prayer. Maritain himself embarrassingly wrote that he had felt it necessary to follow the directions of his clerical adviser as part of his commitment to the church.
But Barré finds it impossible to doubt that Maritain’s “affinity to Maurrasian corresponded to some of his very real convictions at a time when their relationship was publicly known.” Unfortunately, Barré makes no attempt to clarify this surprising transition from committed Dreyfusard and admirer of Jaurès to partisan of Action Française, “a milieu of thought that was the most openly anti-Semitic that could be found.” The lack of any explanation may perhaps be linked to his remark that “Maritain’s complete correspondence remains inaccessible, according to his specific wish.”

This same cleric also urged Maritain, who had begun to lecture at the Institut Catholique, to join in the campaign then being carried on against the influence of Bergson in Catholic circles worried about his undermining of dogma. Maritain’s first book, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, published in 1913, constituted so harsh an attack that he acquired “a reputation for fanaticism and intolerance” that would cling to him for a very long time. Forty years later, in a preface to the English translation of this work, Maritain expressed regret that he had been so pompously harsh and inflexible toward “that master who had awakened me to the metaphysical desire.” Other works of these years, such as his *Three Reformers* (1925)—the three were Luther, Descartes, and Rousseau—continued Maritain’s campaign against all those who had contributed to the catastrophic course in which “the human spirit never ceased to become drunk with its creative power and the illusion that it could freely dispose of its own history.”

Yet while Maritain’s rejection of what he considered the spiritual disaster of modernity seemed to ally him with those who simply wished to restore the past, in fact his neo-Thomism attempted to do quite the opposite. He desired to prove that the ideas of Aquinas could also illuminate the present, and that they could be used, if properly understood, to defend some of the seemingly anarchistic experiments of modern art. The immediate post–World War I years saw a huge explosion of talent and artistic experiment especially in Paris, and the Maritains were very far from being immune to its appeal. Younger artists such as Georges Rouault and the composer Georges Auric formed part of the Bloy circle, and through them the Maritains became acquainted with many of the immensely talented avant-garde personages who swarmed around Jean Cocteau at the café *Le bœuf sur le toit* in Montmartre.

Maritain’s *Art and Scholasticism* (1920), a work that first brought him to the attention of a wider public, was an effort to prove that the ideas of Aquinas could help to understand not only the past but the present as well. It is a small book written in a rebarbative style full of scholastic distinctions and terminology, but surprisingly enough it contains a defense of modern artistic experimentation. As Barré writes, “Retrograde to the point of seeming provocative . . . [it] was closer to Jean Cocteau and Erik Satie than to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.” Art is an act of Making, not of Acting or Knowing, and its rules are provided by the task it sets for itself, not by anything external—and so Maritain could see Cubism as the possible infancy of a new classicism, and declare that “Aristotle would have loved Erik Satie.” Maritain thus became an unexpected spokesman for that “Jazz Age Catholicism” so excellently described by Schlesser, and which brought Catholicism up-to-date with the modern world.

During these years Maritain also became editor of a new series of books called *Roseau d’or*, or *The Golden Reed*, in which he published Paul Claudel, Jean Cocteau, Julien Green, and especially Georges Bernanos. The latter’s novel *Sous le soleil de Satan*, or *Under the Sun of Satan*, created a sensation in 1926, and in the same year the influential critic Albert Thibaudeau wrote, in the distinctively non-Catholic *Nouvelle Revue Française*, that the Catholic novel and Catholic literature had now begun to take “a privileged place” in French intellectual discourse. Maritain’s list also included, incidentally, a book by his friend the Jewish convert Father Jean de Menasce, formerly an ardent Zionist and a specialist in the history of Iranian civilization. The book was called *Quand Israël aime Dieu*, or *When Israel Loves God*, and it was a celebratory interpretation of Hasidism. Its appearance on Maritain’s list may have represented a certain guilty compensation for his anti-Semitic affiliations.

The involvement of the Maritains in this rebirth of Catholic influence was more than purely philosophical and editorial. They organized weekly meetings in their home to discuss the latest issues and ideas, and those in attendance included young students who were later to become notable in one field or another, exiles from their homeland such as the Russian Orthodox philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev and French scholars such as the important Islamicist Louis Massignon and the great Catholic historian of medieval thought Etienne Gilson.

Many turned to Maritain for spiritual consolation, and he and Raïssa became famous (or infamous, depending on the point of view) for having converted Cocteau, the novelist Julien Green, and a number of others to Catholicism. Included in this company was the unsavory and totally unscrupulous Jewish convert Maurice Sachs, who even studied to become a priest. Raïssa was justly suspicious of Sachs (though serving as his godmother at conversion), who had some literary talent and left a book of steamy
memos published posthumously, Le sabbat, which disclosed the largely homo-
sexual underside of the drug-filled and
alcoholic escapades of so many of the
luminaries of this period who turned to
the Maritains for comfort and support.

The memoirs amply cited by Barré
contain many descriptions of the peculiar
sympathetic radiance that emanated
from Maritain’s personality, often
described as “saintly,” and as seeming “to
have stepped down from the porch of a
cathedral.” It is this aura that allowed
him to exercise so powerful an influence
on so many diverse and fiercely
independent figures. Maritain himself was
soft-spoken, reticent, and even hesitantly
awkward; there was nothing at all
commanding, impressive, or even self-
assured about him. I know this from my
own experience, having met him several
times during the later years of his life.
But there was an all-embracing quality
irresistibly conveyed by his personality
that I had never encountered before and
had not encountered since.

I remember casual conversations
during which, it seemed to me, nothing
in the world had become more important
for him than listening to my trivial
words with rapt attention. It was then
that I began to understand his
remarkable success in making conversions,
not only in France but also in the United
States (Allen Tate and Caroline
Gordon, for example). It also helped to
explain his ability to establish firm
friendships with an incredible variety of
Americans, including not only Walter
Lippmann but also John Howard
Griffin, the crusading white journalist who
traveled through the American South
as a black after darkening his skin,
and Dorothy Day, the ex-communist
founder of the Catholic Workers Move-
ment, and Saul Alinsky, the hard-nosed
Jewish labor leader.

In 1926, a crisis arose for Mar-
itan when Maurras and his jour-
nal were condemned by the pope
and placed on the Index. Maritain
had to choose between his loyalty to
Catholicism as a religion and his
commitment to Maurras, who had never
attempted to hide that he was no longer
a believer and whose politics was en-
tirely temporal. Maritain wrote a whole
book, The Primacy of the Spiritual, to
explain the importance of not allowing
the mission of Christian universalism,
which was “to undertake the reconcilia-
tion in justice of all human opposites,”
not to be confused with the limited and purely
political aims of a particular party.

This break with Maurrasism had
the beneficial effect of freeing Maritain
from a political commitment that, if we
are to judge by what ensued, he had
begun to find increasingly troublesome
and compromising. From this time on
he sought to unite his Catholicism not
only with the latest developments in
modern culture, but also with an increas-
ing opposition to the ominous triumphs
of fascism and Nazism. As for com-
munism, he had no illusions about its totali-
tarian nature, but the old admirer of
Jaurès could not be completely impervi-
ous to its appeal. Malraux’s novel Man’s
Fate made a great impression on him,
and he spoke to Raissa in 1933 of “the
human force that the Revolution repre-
sents … the sense of human misery that
the revolutionaries have and that we
must acquire.” He now began to see his
work as being “to awaken ‘powerful centers of spiritual and religious renewal’ in
‘these multitudes of men whom a profound resentment, born of their humili-
ated and offended human dignity, has
turned against Christianity.’”

Taking an active part in the political
life of the period, he helped to organize
committees to aid the refugees created
by Nazism, and joined François Mauriac
in inspiring a protest against Mussolini’s
invasion of Ethiopia, which had been
hailed by his old Maurrasian associates
as a triumph for Western civilization. He
also published a book, Integral Human-
ism, which “threw out the old sacred
conception of politics.” Instead, while “inte-
rational humanism was theocratic … it was
a humanism … a philosophy of the
person and of freedom.” During the Span-
ish Civil War, though denouncing the
atrocities on both sides, he participated
in a meeting organized by Malraux, then
a colonel in the Loyalist Air Force, and
was excoriated by name by Franco’s
son-in-law, his minister of the interior.
Horrified by Hitler, Maritain also began
to denounce anti-Semitism much more
vehemently as anti-Christian. A public
lecture condemning anti-Semitism given
in Paris in 1939 led to an uproar in
which “the speaker was booed and in-
sulted by a part of the audience with
cries of ‘He’s sold out to the Jews’”

Maritain published a major philo-
sophical treatise, Distinguish to Unite or
the Degrees of Knowledge, in 1932, and a
steady stream of other books concerned
with more immediate issues (such as
those already mentioned) kept pouring
from his pen. His fame had become
worldwide, he was invited to lecture
everywhere, and in 1933 he traveled to
North America for the first time. He
joined Étienne Gilson at the Pontifical
Institute of the University of Toronto,
and then was invited to the University of
Chicago at the initiative of the new
president Robert M. Hutchins, though
the latter was unable to get Maritain
appointed to the department of philos-
ophy. Maritain kept returning to teach in
the United States for part of the year at
Chicago, also establishing relations with
the University of Notre Dame, which
now honors the Jacques Maritain Cen-
ter. The Maritains were in the United
States when war broke out in Europe in
1939, and first returned for a visit only
in the autumn of 1944.
After the death of Raissa in 1960, he returned to France to spend his last years in a monastery of the Little Brothers of Jesus, an order that he believed came closer than others to the ideal of St. Francis of Assisi. It is worth noting that the only social function he attended while preparing to leave his Princeton home was the inauguration of John F. Kennedy as the first Catholic president of the United States, to which he had been personally invited.

It is impossible here to do more than mention some of the other books that Maritain wrote during this latter part of his life. In his penetrating *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (1953), he returned to re-evaluate (but by no means to renounce) his old appreciations of avant-garde art. The intended first volume of a history of ethics, *La Philosophie morale* (1960), begins with Socrates and ends with a reverentially discriminating treatment of Bergson. Others dealt with specifically religious-philosophical issues, such as *De la grâce et de l’humanité de Jésus* (On the Grace and Humanity of Jesus, 1967) and *De l’Eglise du Christ* (On the Church of Christ, 1970). Another, *Le Paysan de la Garonne* (The Peasant of the Garonne, 1966), which contained a critical but by no means hostile discussion of the reforms initiated by the Second Vatican Council, even became a best-seller. As he wrote jubilantly in a letter, “the Peasant has risen to just a few degrees below Simone de Beauvoir.”

Maritain returned for a last visit to the United States in 1966 to say farewell to old friends and to visit the grave of his sister-in-law Vera buried in Princeton. At the same time he went to see others, one of whom was the poet and monk Thomas Merton. The latter regaled him with recordings of Bob Dylan, “whom he [Merton] considers a great poet, a modern Villon. What a strange scene it is,” writes the friend accompanying Maritain, “listening in the monastery of Gethsemani to the hard and expressive voice of a young rebel poet. Jacques likes ‘The Gates of Heaven’ especially.”

(This is probably a mistaken reference to “Gates of Eden.”) It is with such an appealing image, which seems to unite so many of the seemingly clashing facets of Maritain’s remarkable personality, that we can best grasp the secret of his astonishing career.

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**Alan Taylor**

**The Fire Last Time**

**New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan**

By Jill Lepore

(Alfred A. Knopf, 315 pp., $26.95)

In 1741, New York City hosted a great—but largely forgotten—American tragedy. Limited to the southern tip of Manhattan Island, colonial New York was a small but tightly packed city of 10,000 people. Living in about 1,500 houses, mostly wooden, the inhabitants dreaded fire. On March 18, fire consumed the royal governor’s mansion and most of the surrounding fort. The inhabitants initially blamed the blaze on a careless workman, but more fires followed in late March and early April. As more homes went up in smoke, the inhabitants suspected a plot by their enslaved Africans, who constituted one-fifth of the city’s population.

The fires produced a panic, magnified by the culture’s tendency to seek a malign conspiracy behind any alarming event. And paranoids do have enemies. New Yorkers recalled that in 1712 some rebellious slaves had torched a building and killed nine fleeing whites. In retribution, twenty rebels died on the gallows, three at the stake. More recently, New York’s newspapers reported dangerous slave revolts elsewhere in the British Empire, including the West Indian island of Antigua in 1756. Three years later in South Carolina, rebellious slaves burned...