

jurisdiction for another fifty years after the fall of Napoleon as he did not have the time to ruin completely the old régime.

It was because the jurisdiction of the abbesses was so closely connected with the right to rule of the nobility that the system of the quasi-episcopal abbesses was lost at the change-over to democracy. The idea of democracy was borrowed from ancient Greece where women had no part in government. Women were not at first included in the new democratic structure. The extension of the vote was given to men only. Women had to fight for their rights. It is only since 1958 that peeresses in England have been able to sit in the House of Lords as they did earlier in the times of Edward III. So, now that the democratic system is overcoming sex discrimination, we may look forward to a time when the Roman and English Churches will reform themselves in accordance with present-day society.

Judgment and the New Morality

by Stanley Hauerwas

This essay is an attempt at a modest diatribe against some of the themes often associated with the 'new moral theology'. It is my contention that in our enthusiasm for the seeming freedom promised in the new love ethic we have forgotten that the self must be transformed if we are to see the world as it is, and that the transformation into loving persons is not accomplished overnight by declaring our good intentions but by submitting patiently to the suffering that makes us real. We have impoverished our ethics by assuming that our lives can easily embody and reflect the good. In our moral behaviour, we have tacitly accepted existence in a world where God does not exist; in such a world, evil often appears beautiful and even kind. Such a situation is all the more pernicious because we claim to base our self-imposed blindness on love, kindness, justice, and even Jesus Christ. The main purpose of this essay is to try to locate some of the problems that have led us to confuse illusion with reality, for only when we understand the nature of our self-deception can we begin to appreciate how wonderful and yet how painful it is to live in a world where the good is not easily done.

Myths above the history of ethics

The kind of problems I am going to attack are not to be identified with any one of several moral theologians. I am much more interested in a general mood that surrounds current ethical reflection and

behaviour; at times this attitude is mirrored in or encouraged by the work of professional Christian moralists. Of course, there is great danger in directing my critique at a mood; moods are notoriously hard to pin down. But a pervasive illusion demands a serious attack, even if the enemy is nebulous and elusive.

I am particularly concerned about three problems: (1) the potential of the new moral theology because of its highly general character to be captured by conceptions of the good alien to the Gospels, (2) the tendency to confuse apologetics with ethics, and (3) the reduction of ethical issues to pastoral-psychological questions. I do not think these problems are endemic to the Roman Catholic context, for they arise from general ethical assumptions which are widely shared today. However, Roman Catholics have tended to be particularly susceptible to these problems because they seem to believe in a popular version of their peculiar moral history.

The history begins with an account of a very dark age when every aspect of a Catholic's behaviour was dominated by a legalistic and authoritarian moral structure. Such an ethic was inhuman, since its concern was only for the multiplication of laws rather than the development of good men. Besides being legalistic, it was excessively judgmental and encouraged a minimalistic understanding of the duties of the Christian life. Man's nature during this time was understood primarily in static terms, with no appreciation of the relativity of our cultural and historical positions. As a result, ethics and the moral life of Christians were divorced from any relation to Scripture and fundamental theology.

But beginning with Pope John and the Council, continues the legend, a new age has been ushered in, marking a radical discontinuity with the repression of the past. Amid refrains such as 'Love is the only absolute' and 'Christ is the new law', Roman Catholic moral theology and behaviour have turned the corner towards a fuller and more morally worthy Christian ethic. Love, *agape*, is now taken as the centre, source, and motivation of all moral activity. Ethics must serve the person, for law and norms are significant only as they contribute to the increased humanity of our individual lives. The ethical man is the dynamic agent, not he who only seeks to do what the law requires. A moral life so conceived and so practised denotes the return to Scripture and fundamental theology, for faith and ethics are not two independent spheres but two sides of the same coin.

While I am sure this account of Roman Catholic ethical thought and behaviour is not wholly incorrect, it does tend to oversimplify the picture. At least it seems advisable to make a distinction between the actual practice of the moral life among Catholics and the theoretical exposition of that life found in the text-books. For it may well be that the tradition and practice embodied in the Church's liturgy and common life are richer than its explicit moral theology. It

seems odd that Catholics who are the inheritors of such a rich liturgical and spiritual tradition still associate theology and ethics exclusively with the explicit intellectual formulations of their theologians. Even within Catholic moral theology, the disastrous text-book caricature is not wholly representative. Certainly any sensitive reading of the scholastic tradition gives one quite a different impression of the vitality of Catholic moral reflection.

The vagueness of the new morality

But this objection to the above account of the development of Catholic ethics is somewhat beside the point. For the account is now so pervasive that its sheer numerical acceptance seems to confirm its truth. Thus I am concerned with the account not primarily because it distorts history, but rather because its acceptance produces the disastrously vague character of the new moral theology. For now any ethics that attempts to dictate or suggest norms for moral behaviour is automatically condemned as reactionary. The modern ethical task seems to consist of suggesting compelling slogans which can encompass all kinds and manners of life. The problem which such platitudes is not that they are wrong, but that they lull us into thinking we know, when we know nothing.

Thus in contemporary Catholic ethics we find such recommendations as these: Christian behaviour is fundamentally conformity to Christ; the Christian ethic is the ethic of love; we as Christians should conform to God's dynamic action in the world; natural law 'is a *dynamic existing reality*, an ordering of man towards his self-perfection and his self-realization, through all the concrete situation of his life and in intersubjective dialogue with his fellow man and with God'.¹ But we are never told what attitudes, dispositions, or motives are appropriate to conformation to Christ; what actions or classes of action are enjoined or prohibited by Christian love; how we are to distinguish God's action in the world from that which is not God's; or, finally, what sense it makes to claim that such an interpretation of natural law is a 'law' at all. These questions reveal that with broad theological affirmations one has only begun to do theological ethics, for the behavioural significance or specification of such claims is by no means clear. If such affirmations are ever to be more than homiletical flourishes, their concrete implications must be drawn with greater clarity and detail.

If this is not done, the great danger is that we will fill the void with unexamined and perhaps even perverse content. For ethical reflection may exist in a highly abstract form, but men cannot. We must decide to stay married or celibate, to fight in war or not to fight, to teach our children this rather than that. If 'love' or 'being in Christ' does not inform these decisions, then we will make them on some

¹Louis Monden, *Sin, Liberty, and Law* (New York: Sheed and Mard, 1965), p. 89.

other basis. Most of us simply take our cues in these matters from the accepted values and practices of our social context. As finite beings we simply do not have the time or moral energy to examine every such decision we must make. While this is unavoidable, it does point to the significance of what society we identify with; unless we have already achieved a state of blessedness, we cannot assume that our decisions are related in even a tangential way to what the Scripture means by 'being in Christ' or manifesting Christian 'love'. The problem is not that a Christian ethic does not find its centre in Christ; modern moralists are right about this; but can this affirmation easily be associated with our concrete life?

In this respect, the divorce of moral theology from confessional practice may have an unanticipated effect. With all its minimalism and scrupulosity, the moral theology of the confessional was at least concrete. As the new moral theology has become more concerned with the 'whole person' and his 'entire life', it is in danger of justifying ways of life that are fundamentally foreign to Christianity. It has sacrificed any means of testing concretely the relation of our theological claims to the ways of life supposed to be warranted by them. These claims may become simply an ideological justification for practices based on different presuppositions about the nature of the world. That this may already be occurring in moral theology is suggested by the fact that Christians are now entertaining the possibility that killing can be a loving act or that adultery can take on the form of Christ. We need not be surprised at this; Christians have long known that witches may appear beautiful and sin enticing. What is new is our forgetting that regardless of its beauty it is still sin.

Another indication of the vacuous character of moral theology is what I would call the 'politicization of the moral'. By this I mean that many Christians seem to think one's primary response to moral questions is to take a 'liberal' or 'conservative' stance. Thus contraception is no longer discussed in terms of the moral nature of marriage and sexuality; rather, one is offered the opportunity of being either for or against *Humanae Vitae*. Being 'for' is associated with the legalism and authoritarianism of the past; being 'against' makes one a participant in the love and freedom of the 'wave of the future'. Both sides assume that it is no longer possible to discuss moral questions in terms of rightness or wrongness since the issue has already been emptied of moral content or context. I am arguing that what is demanded of a good man is not that he be liberal or conservative but that he be willing to do the right.

Ethics and apologetics

The problem of the possible ideological perversion of the 'new morality' is compounded by the tendency to confuse ethics and apologetics—the temptation in the name of relevance to baptize the secular for the glory of God. The tremendous thirst for relevance

among theologians and Christians today is understandable, but that makes it no less destructive of the Christian ethical life and reflection. The new morality is a response to the feeling that the Church has misled the world by its stubborn defence of a system of unintelligible symbols and of values eroded beyond recognition. It is naturally assumed that the way to purge our guilt in this respect is fondly to embrace 'modern man's self-understanding'. Many reason that if Christ's redemption is universal, then the non-Christian of good will may even have greater moral insight than the Christian himself. Thus the Christian's job is now to catch up with the more progressive morality of those outside the Church.

Thus John Milhaven says that while Christ's love is still the heart of the Christian life,

in keeping with contemporary thinking, 'love' means something new. Love is no longer basically a trusting submission that searches out God's universal laws for human behavior and institutions. . . . Rather the new trend sees God leaving it completely up to man as to how things turn out. Christian 'Love', therefore, comes to mean that a man takes from God into his own hands all responsibility for what happens. It is up to him, not God, to figure out what will be good for those concerned and how this good can be realized, just as it is up to him, not God, to act and make the good a reality. In this sense, it can be said that the new Christian love proceeds as it would *etsi deus non daretur*, even if there were no God. Facing his responsibility, the Christian sees himself 'having come of age' and now 'condemned to freedom'.

As theology follows the way of American thinking today, the contemporary vision of Christian responsibility is pragmatic and empirical. Responsibility means responsibility for consequences as they take place in human experience.¹

While I have some question as to how Milhaven is so sure he has identified 'contemporary thinking' or 'American thinking today', my primary concern is with the further question: given such a description of the content of the contemporary mind, why does Milhaven assume this should be taken as normative? Can one assume that 'modern man' is free of the perversities that have characterized man from the beginning? It is interesting that Milhaven seems to glorify the optimistic faith that men can be completely rational and free—just at the time when 'modern man' seems to be developing a new appreciation of the limits of his power. Perhaps a theology and ethics that seeks to be relevant as its first order of business always tends to be relevant to what has just ceased to exist.

However, my more serious objection to this form of moral theology is that it fails in its very intention. Such a moral theology cannot be apologetic, for it has nothing to bring to the dialogue; it announces

¹John Milhaven, 'The Behavioral Sciences and Christian Ethics', in *Projectives: Shaping An American Theology for the Future*, edited by O'Meara and Weisser (New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 138.

to the secular world, as though by way of discovery, what the secular world has been announcing to it for a rather long time.¹ What we have here is not apologetics, but capitulation. As such, it betrays not only the task of Christian ethics, but also the 'modern man' it wishes to address. For such a man exists only in rhetoric. Modern man is not faced with infinite possibilities, but with questions such as whether he should work to sustain his marriage, how to find meaning in his work, and what he should do with his time. We are not 'men come of age'; like men of any age, we must learn to see ourselves without the grand illusion that we create ourselves or the good. We need an ethic which will help us learn the language² and propose forms of the moral life that help us escape our illusions and see ourselves, others, and the world with justice and humility.

Morals and seeing the truth

The basis and aim of the moral life is to see the truth, for only as we see correctly can we act in accordance with reality. Even though the good can be embodied in our choices, we do not create it through our choices. However, we are not able to 'see' the good simply by looking; to be man is to create and love illusion, for few of us can bear to look long at the sun.³ Our vision must be trained and disciplined in order to free it from our neurotic self-concern and the assumption that conventionality defines the real. Ethics is that modest discipline which uses careful language, distinctions, and stories to break our intellectual bewitchment. Christian ethics is the systematic investigation of the astounding claim that the world and our self is only rightly seen and intended in the light of what God has done in the person and work of Jesus Christ, for this world is real exactly because God has created and sustained it through his sacrificial love.

It is only in such terms that Christian ethics can provide a basis for a proper apologetics or be relevant in any significant sense. If it accepts the subtle and enticing temptation to take as normative the current accounts or reality, it only ensnares men further in the darkness of illusion. We cannot start with the question of what modern man will accept as true; we must begin with the nature and content of the true and good, whether such a man will accept it or not. An apologetic that is not first based on truth is but propaganda.

Another confusion similar to the identification of ethics with apologetics is the assumption that an ethical response is the same as pastoral compassion. I think I can best illustrate what I mean through an example. Suppose a man comes to a priest to confess his intimate involvement with a woman other than his wife. The priest discovers

¹For a similar argument see Alasdair MacIntyre, *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

²For a suggestive analysis of the relation of language and ethics, see: Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love and Language* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1969), and my 'Situation Ethics, Moral Notions, and Theological Ethics', *Irish Theological Quarterly* (July, 1971), pp. 242-257.

³Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London, 1971).

that this man's marriage has never been happy, his wife has always been frigid, and he has tolerated this situation for some time before his current infidelity. Moreover, he did not actively seek to betray his wife; rather, the affair developed from a friendship with one of the secretaries in his office. Their mutual interests, their natural rapport, their genuine caring for each other finally led them to share a bed.

A practitioner of the old morality would have little difficulty knowing how to respond to this case. It is clear the man is an adulterer; he should submit to due punishment and break off the affair immediately. Pastorally, however, this surely seems to be an inhuman and insensitive way of dealing with this person. For, in fact, the indiscretion has changed his whole life by giving him new insight into genuine human interdependence. It is as if he has discovered the world for the first time: colours are brighter, birds really sing, and life is genuinely worth living. Moreover, the same is true for his beloved. Rather than judging this to be a grievous sin, the spiritual counsellor must see it as a positive good; surely God wills such human fulfilment. I suspect that many consider this positive response to be the truly moral one; it seems to respect all the human complexities involved in the situation.

Yet I think that there is good reason why this latter response should not be considered ethically sufficient. First, such a 'compassionate' response amounts to a denial of the significance of language for our understanding of ethical situations. If every act is open to re-description in terms of being a 'loving' or 'good' act, then ethically we have come to live in a world where all colours are reduced to dull grey. Let me be very clear about this. I am not saying that we must at all costs maintain that this is an adulterous act in order to point a judgmental finger at this man. My point is that unless we are clear about what has gone on here, we will not be able to minister to this man at all, at least not to minister to him in the name of Jesus Christ. Ironically, when the ethical is completely identified with pastoral compassion, then there is no basis for pastoral concern.

For example, if we say to this man that he really has not committed adultery but done a 'loving' thing, then we sell short his moral capabilities. To insist on describing his action as adultery is to raise a whole range of questions that might not otherwise be considered. For example, what is his obligation to his wife? How has he contributed over the years to the emptiness that is their marriage? What should the significance of sexual intercourse be for the development of a morally healthy marriage? How has he contributed to his wife's inadequacy in this regard? Finally, if he intends to divorce his wife and marry his current love, how is the nature of such a 'marriage' to be understood morally?

Obviously, these are not questions calculated to increase the pastoral subject's current happiness; nevertheless, they are significant

questions that offer him the possibility of deepening his own moral stance. They are pain-causing questions, to be sure, but we cannot stamp out the fires of illusion without pain. To face reality is to confront our comfortable assumptions: that the primary moral good is to be happy in a rather trivial sense, that such happiness is attainable, and that his happiness can satisfy our being. These are illusions which ignore the fact that we become good, and indeed happy, only to the extent that we are willing to sacrifice and suffer. It is of course painful to lose such illusions, but only through such painful enlightenment can we appreciate how wonderful it is that grey is not red, and that marriage excludes adultery.

Acceptance of the other

I am well aware that this is at odds with many current assumptions about the ethics of interpersonal relations. The new morality sees the acceptance of the other as the good. It urges us to go out to the other genuinely in an attempt to understand him for the unique being he is. It tells us we are out of order if we judge him by abstract norms irrelevant to the contingencies of his situation; rather, we should help him accept his situation so that he can come to a fuller realization of his humanity. For the aim of the moral life, according to these moralists, is not the good but adjustment, to be able to accept oneself for what one is. Such an ethic represents the triumph of the therapeutic over the moral. Guilt is not an appropriate response to a bad act, but a puritan inhibition to be eliminated because it limits my capacity for being fully human. Suffering is not the condition necessary to clear our vision so we can bear to see the inhumanity we inflict on others, but an evil avoidable if we are uncommitted, nonjudgmental, and open to all.

Such a view of the moral life is extremely compelling. It seems to embody the basic human virtues of compassion, kindness, openness, and sensitivity. But it is actually an ethic of sentimentality for it assumes that persons should be accepted in indifference to what they are or have done. (Of course, to point to wrongdoing is not always the same as blaming the person responsible for it.) Acceptance and personalism in such a context condemn the other to his own self-limitations in discerning and achieving the happy life. 'Kindness' so understood is but our unwillingness to make our self and the other uncomfortable by speaking the truth. Finally, they destroy the significance of human action, for what a person is and does no longer counts for anything. Christians today have developed a morbid fear of guilt; we will go to any lengths to avoid admitting that we ourselves or others are truly evil. But only as we are willing to judge the other can we show a true respect for him as a person. For by judgment we accept him as one capable of growth. By speaking the truth in love, we help him face the fact that in loving one he has hated the other; only through such a painful perception can he

recognize depths to life which he had not previously seen. If an ethic of 'personalism' does not entail a normative conception of what we can and ought to be, then it is but a claim that what we are is good. This is humanism which should not be disguised with the label of 'Christian' ethics.

The new emphasis that acceptance of the other is good in itself entails a parallel conception of God. God is viewed as the great understander, the paradigm liberal, who perceives all and is committed to nothing. He is the All-forgiving who, in the name of love, excludes no one from eternal beatitude, no matter how perverse the candidate might be. It is hard to comprehend how such a God of eternal kindness could ever have ended up on a cross; surely the formation of sensitivity groups would have been a more effective strategy. Here we no longer have a God who invites men to participate in a kingdom of righteousness where citizenship requires obedience; the 'modern' God can have no kingdom at all, since there can be no possible boundaries to his love. To believe or not to believe in such a God makes little difference, since by definition we live in a universe where the pain that difference necessarily occasions is excluded. Yet such a world is also of little interest; in it we could not appreciate how wonderful it is that we have many colours and not just one, suffering and judgment and not just happiness.

We all feel uneasy with a position that might entail judgment of another, for we know how great is our own weakness. We all seem caught today in the modern form of self-righteousness of the 'guiltier than thou' form. Moreover, we know how easily we can perversely turn right judgment into means of imposing our arbitrary will on others. The safeguard against such perversion, however, is not to refrain from judgment but to base our judgment on ethical grounds that make our biographical limitations irrelevant. For our moral judgments towards others and theirs towards us are good just to the extent that we can give reasons for the judgment beyond our own first-person involvement. It is our ability to articulate our criteria of judgment and to clarify their significance for our lives together that raises the judgmental situation above the morass of our subjectivities.

In the name of a more humane ethic, contemporary Christian ethics down-grades principles, rules, criteria and institutions; this move is ironical since it is just such objective realities which enable us to be humane. For inhumanity towards another is the imposition of our will for no reason beyond our possession of power. In such an ethic, all moral relations become variations of a master-slave relation rendered all the more perverse because it is done in the name of love. Only as we can enunciate the basis of our judgments and articulate disciplined moral arguments can our relations with others rise above the shallowness and arbitrariness of our individual interests.

Objectivity and morals

Thus the moralist seeks and analyses criteria for moral judgments that can receive substantiation beyond our subjective adherence to them. This quest is not aimed at defining in a narrow way the limits of human behaviour, the 'do's' and 'don't's' of human life. Rather, it is an attempt to make us alive to the basis for creative human interaction. For only as we can meet the other on common grounds of a more substantive humanity than either of us embodies can our relations ever be freed from the aggression we perpetrate on each other in the hope of gaining a more secure position. Of course, the objectivity of moral criteria and institutions is always in danger of legalistic perversion, but our salvation from legalism cannot come about by simply raising the status of our own subjectivities.

The objectivity of moral argument is ultimately dependent on the shared commitments and values of a community. There is no heavenly realm of values that exists independently of their embodiment in human agents and institutions. Rather, values are shared by *these* men in *this* place in and through their common experience. The ultimate appeal in any argument can therefore only be the appeal to the wisdom of the community's experience as it is found in our inherited language, practices, and institutions. Such shared experience grounds the authority necessary to sustain the community's moral life. For the function of authority is to speak back to the community its basic commitments by enunciating concrete goals and norms for united action. It is only when such a community ceases to exist that the voice of authority takes the form of authoritarianism, and coercion is required to force consent. For true authority calls forth the willing obedience of its subjects; it wills the good that unites the one exercising authority with the subject in common action.

This point is particularly important in relation to the divisive discussion associated with *Humane Vitae*. For the debate reveals that the Church lacks the kind of community of commitment that would make such a discussion edifying rather than destructive. In such a context, what we have is a power struggle rather than genuine ethical argument. This places a specially heavy burden on those who dissent, for they must try to formulate their arguments in a way that will increase the possibility of genuine authority being exercised in the Church. We must remember that ultimately the important question is not about the licit use of contraception but about the nature of the Christian community necessary to sustain moral judgment that does not kill but makes alive.

Even though I am on the whole sympathetic with those who dissent from *Humanae Vitae* I am often troubled by the form their arguments take. For their position is often based on the assumption that the Church should respect the right of the individual conscience in moral matters, that it is a betrayal of moral autonomy for the

Church to impose such demands on the individual. But if the right of the individual conscience is given such authority on a matter like contraception, then on what basis does the Church command obedience about how Christians should regard persons of another colour? Let us be careful that in our concern to 'win' this particular skirmish we do not employ means that will destroy the basis for genuine authority on issues that are at the heart of a people who are called to be Christian.

Morals and the moral life

This issue finally uncovers the problem that is most crucial for contemporary reflection in Christian ethics. Even though I think the issues I have discussed are important, they are only symptoms of a much deeper problem. They do not reach down to the heart of Christian existence or behaviour. This does not mean that it is not significant to clarify and analyse the Christian moral life, but philosophical discussion only begins to deal with the problem it confronts.

For theological ethics is not a 'creative' discipline; rather, it is parasitical on the form of the moral life that Christian men and women act out in in their historical context. Christian ethics cannot create the form of Christian life and existence, it can only analyse and conceptually articulate what Christians have found to be the nature of the good in their actual living. I suspect that contemporary Christian ethics is superficial precisely because it is an all-too-faithful witness to the shallowness of our own individual lives.

Because we consider ourselves modern man, our Christian ethics has uncritically accepted the presumptuous assumptions of modern humanism and embodies them in a thinly-veiled form. In the name of love, the new morality warrants the idea that the moral life is primarily the securing of our own happiness, 'Christian ethics' can do this because that is what we each assume. Christian ethics in the interest of 'personalism' avoids any judgmental form because none of us wishes to be judged and found wanting. Christian ethics in the name of 'ethical sensitivity' pays little attention to the nature of moral argument because few of us wish to take up the demanding task of defending our positions with rigour and clarity; we are content with the noncommittal mediocrity of 'it seems to me'. Christian ethics tends to identify all authority with authoritarianism because we do not wish to lay down our individual wills for the good common to a Christian community.

I know of no solution for such a problem. For theological and anthropological reasons I distrust all suggestions that imply that all we need to do is try harder. Our problems and our weaknesses are of a far too fundamental nature to assume they can be resolved by moral effort for such effort only continues to confirm us in our illusion of self-significance. Change will come only when we are

compelled by an object that is so true, beautiful, and good that we forget about our petty efforts and genuinely look at the other. Christians assume such an object exists and has taken the compelling form of Jesus of Nazareth. But such an object no longer compels us because we assume that we no longer need redemption or that such a God can redeem us. For we assume that loving the world and the other can be done without pain and guilt. But it is just such an assumption that makes our world a dungeon of boredom and dullness when compared to the richness of the world we find redeemed on the cross of Christ. It may be that we will not be able to become a redeemed people, but at least we can try to write our moral theology more honestly. We can stop trying to justify by the Gospel the trivialities of our own existence. If we do that, we may find that even though we are not yet living Christian lives, we are at least on the road to the beginning of what such a life might look like.

Does Simenon write a Metaphysical Novel?

by S. G. A. Luff

Georges Simenon writes detective stories, many featuring the amiable Inspecteur Maigret, almost too human to fit the traditional image of the sleuth. Simenon may be read more for atmosphere than for thrills, for Maigret's Paris, or the provincial towns of many non-Maigret stories; the weather mostly wintry with long evenings, the interest in trains, back streets, canals, bars, the small homes of small people in small worlds. And among these I find even more intriguing those with a Belgian scene, the Meuse, the industrial zone around Liège where young Simenon began as a reporter on the local press. Here are his native tow-paths and backyards, alleys and *impasses*, and a certain quality of *mud*, of earth and water and the two compounded.

Simenon does not normally set out to retail experiences that demand a transcendental world, least of all that purveyed by the Church. Where religious detail slips in it is seldom more than part of the narrative, handy description—as far as the author is concerned echoes from childhood, and usually no more than that for the characters too. Churchgoing is something children do and it is good for them; subsequently a minority elects to remain in this church sub-culture and becomes a characteristic feature of Sunday mornings.