LEST INNOCENT BLOOD BE SHED

THE STORY OF THE VILLAGE
OF LE CHAMBON AND HOW
GOODNESS HAPPENED THERE

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New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London
concerned with this problem. They were at peace with themselves.

When they told their friends that they were really free, and without signing the oath, the one who had recommended being a skunk with skunks said, "Shit! Your Christian dodge works pretty well sometimes, doesn't it?"

Before they left, the ministers gathered together their closest friends, formed a circle holding hands, and sang a song Roger Darcissac had taught them. The song was one the people of Le Chambon often sang. Its melody was the same as that of "Auld Lang Syne," and its words meant: "It's only au revoir, my brothers; it's only au revoir."

The paper pledging allegiance to Pétain and the National Revolution was never again used. There had been a little breakthrough at Saint-Paul d'Eyjéaux.

But none of the circle, except for the ministers, lived to go home. A few days after the Chambonnais left, all of the remaining inmates were deported to concentration camps in Poland and salt mines in Silesia. Almost all of them died at hard labor or in the gas chambers of a death camp.

André Trocmé, the Soul of Le Chambon

Vichy and the Germans were quite right to arrest Trocmé first in their attempt to clean out that "nest of Jews in Protestant country." It was Trocmé more than any other single person in the village who had made what happened happen.

A refugee who spent many months in Le Chambon once found herself reminiscing about her arrival there. "Upon my arrival," she said, "I saw Pastor André Trocmé, and I knew instantly that he was the soul of Le Chambon."

There are differences of opinion among Chambonnais about various things that happened in those four years, about where the blank ration and identity cards came from, the cards that saved
so many refugees’ lives, and about whether there were Chambonnais informers sending information to Vichy about the Resistance in the first two years of the Occupation, and about other topics. But if you walk into any house in Le Chambon that still contains a person who was an adult during the war years, and if you ask that person, “Why did Le Chambon do these things against the government and for the refugees while the nearby Protestant village of Le Mazet did not?” you will receive only one answer: “It was Pastor André Trocmé.” Whether or not this can be proved to be true (and who can answer such questions with finality?), the fact is that when you try to understand the peculiar spirit of Le Chambon, you find that all roads lead to André Trocmé, just as all roads led to him when Vichy was trying to punish and wipe out the Resistance in Le Chambon in February 1943.

The refugee who saw Trocmé as the soul of Le Chambon meant many things by her metaphor, but mainly she meant that he was the quickening spirit, the warming force in that gray, poverty-stricken and dangerous years. She meant that he set an example for the Chambonnais: he “welcomed refugees in a wide embrace,” as she put it. A soul for her was a source of outgoing warmth. A Chambonnais, not a refugee, and one of Trocmé’s oldest friends, once said, “He wanted to hug you—yes, even to kiss you. My! You know, he was—yes, he was sexual, almost, he wanted to embrace you!” True, the speaker was himself a very shy man, and his feelings about Trocmé’s almost erotic warmth reflect as much about him as they do about Trocmé, but the pastor’s open-armed generosity toward his fellowman was as real as this man’s shyness.

Trocmé was far from being only a loving man. Everybody who knew him at all well agreed that he was capable of immense anger. In any case, nobody I have ever talked with has suggested that Theis, the assistant pastor of the village, be thought of as the soul of Le Chambon, and the reason why this is so can be seen in two stories, stories that reveal the immense differences between a man of enlivening and sometimes terrifying passion and a man who was a rock upon whom others could build lasting edifices.

In the fall of 1938, Édouard Theis was beginning his life in Le Chambon as half-time pastor under Trocmé. One evening he was asked to officiate at his first funeral services in the big, gray, boxlike temple. Coming in through the main door with the rest—a door over which stands the inscription “Love one another”—he quietly sat down among the parishioners and waited. After a while somebody said, “Well, where is the pastor?” Then, and only then, Theis lumbered up to the front of the congregation and in his quiet voice said, as if he himself were still in some doubt about it, “Oh, but that’s me. Yes, I am the pastor.”

The other story is about André Trocmé. Long after the war, he was giving one of his many lectures on nonviolence outside of Le Chambon when a certain member of the audience began to turn to his neighbor and whisper audibly whenever Trocmé made an interesting point. It turned out later that he admired what Trocmé was saying. After a few such whisperings, Trocmé stopped his lecture suddenly, walked up to the vivacious whisperer, fixed his blue eyes down upon his upturned, stupefied face, and shouted, his fair, baby-soft face flushed with rage, “Out of the room! Get out of the room!” And with a massive arm he pointed the way to the door while calling over his shoulder for an usher to conduct the miscreant out. The lecture had been on nonviolence.

Magda Trocmé once called her husband a turbulent stream, thrusting its way with great speed and force through and around obstacles, changing always as it struck and flowed. Then she pointed to a rock in such a stream and said, “Ah, that is Édouard Theis. The rock of Le Chambon. Look. It sits for hours and days and years, faithful to where it stands, unshakable.” A rock is not a source of movement. A stream is; in fact, it is itself liquid turbulence. And a soul, whatever else it may be, is a source of vivacity. It brings passion to a body and moves other bodies and souls with that passion. Such was André Trocmé.

But a soul is not only emotion. For the Greeks it was an arche
(initiator, source). The rocklike resister of Vichy and the Nazis who spent the last year of the Occupation taking Jewish refugees through dangerous mountains to safety in Switzerland was not a bold initiator. Theirs once said, “I was the follower, the helper, yes! The second fiddle to André Trocmé!” And his happiness in saying this was not only the happiness this man feels in anonymity, but the happiness he feels in telling a plain truth.

For the early Greek philosophers, the soul was the initiator of the body’s movements, the one world-moving force, which leaves the body in death, but in life initiates, say, each movement of your eyes across this page, each movement of your hand to turn it. The nearby village of Le Mazet was “dead” as far as attracting and protecting refugees was concerned because it lacked—perhaps among other things—the unflagging inventiveness of the mind of André Trocmé. He kept discovering new things to do that would give substance to the words above the temple door: “Love one another.”

Since ethics is concerned with an individual’s character, it is fitting that our ethical attitude toward Le Chambon be directed, ultimately, toward an individual. There was no more creative individual in Le Chambon than Trocmé. It is true that he could not have done what he did without Thés, and his wife, and many others, just as a soul cannot do what it does without a body, at least here on earth; but it was he who set the goals of Le Chambon during those years, and it was his practical ingenuity that set the example for successfully pursuing those goals.

Instead of trying to pluck out the heart of his mystery, the key to his mind, let me try to answer a rather modest question: What events in his life can help us to understand his belief that human life is priceless? It was in the service of this belief that he made Le Chambon a “city of refuge” (a term taken from the Old Testament), and if we can understand that belief in terms of his life, we shall be ready to understand in depth what he did in Le Chambon.

André Pascal Trocmé was born on Easter of 1901 (his middle name is the French word for Easter). When he was born, the big windows of the bedroom were thrown open so that the sunlight of Easter morning could come through, and so that the bells of the nearby basilica celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ could bring their sounds deep into the room. (Those bells were later melted down by the Germans to make cannons.) From the beginning, his pious Protestant parents hoped he would become a pastor.

The city of his birth was Saint-Quentin, in Picardy, the northeastern region of France bordering on the English Channel and Belgium. In this region John Calvin, whose French Protestant followers came to be called Huguenots, was born in the sixteenth century. Here some of the most violent and protracted battles of World War I would be fought. Religion and war would be the main forces in Trocmé’s youth.

His mother, the former Paula Schwerdtmann, was born in Germany of German parents and ancestry. His father was Paul Eugène Trocmé, a descendant of an old Huguenot family. In his early youth, Trocmé was to find his German relatives far warmer and more attractive than the Huguenot kinfolk of his severe French father. In fact, far from leading the provincial life typical of the tiny minority of Protestants in twentieth-century France, Trocmé led a life that was international to its very roots. Sometimes that internationalism took the form of having his German grandfather put his gigantic, warm hands upon his head and bless him in order to keep away the Bösewicht (Devil). But sometimes his internationalism caused him great pain. During World War I, he saw the countrymen of his mother kicking and shooting Russian prisoners in the streets of Saint-Quentin.

Trocmé’s father was a very successful manufacturer of lace, whose success in business had contributed much to the wealth of Saint-Quentin. Their house had a dozen bedrooms, and because of his father’s unexplained orders, its second floor was to remain remote for him until he was thirteen years old. As a child he played in a large yard surrounded by high stone walls. His early
years of schooling were spent at home with private tutors, and one of the most striking impressions of his youth was that he was one of le peuple Trocmé (the Trocmé people), who were apart and different from others. He was separated from others by wealth and by the rigid demands his father made upon his behavior and thinking. In his childhood his warmhearted, expansive German relatives only contributed to his feeling of separation from his native city. When he wearied of playing in the walled yard with his carefully chosen friends or his brothers and sisters, instead of leaving the yard, he stayed within those walls and yearned for his vacations with his pipe-smoking, beer-drinking, unbuttoned German relatives. But even between him and them there was a wall; his father did not approve of smoking, drinking, or bending, and so André found himself loving his German relatives but not entirely approving of them. They were not in that elite group of "Trocmé people."

Before World War I, two events smashed holes in the walls that separated le peuple Trocmé from the rest of mankind. In the fall of 1912, André was playing at war with his brother Étienne; pebbles were the cannonballs, cardboard tubes were the cannons, and the boom came from the boys themselves. There was a back door in the walls of the Trocmé estate that the gardener used to enter and leave without disturbing the family. This door Étienne and André romantically labeled the "postern gate," their own secret entrance to their own medieval fortress. On this fall day, the boys were so busy playing at war that they did not notice that the postern gate was slowly swinging on its hinges—the gardener had forgotten to lock it. But at last the swinging gate attracted their attention, and, stopping their play, they saw a bony, pale man wearing a flat cap, a short coat, and shapeless gray pants. A cigarette hung from his lips. He looked at the two upper-class boys for what seemed to be a long time, in silence. Then he started shaking his head, and a glance of bitter but detached pity came into his eyes as he said, "Tas de cons" ("Bastards"). Then he left, closing the postern gate behind him.

For the rest of his life Trocmé remembered that pâle voyou (pale guy), and for the rest of his life he would have to bear the burden of those looks and that judgment. From then on, he knew that others, not the "Trocmé people" but the poor, the excluded, the bitter ones of the earth were watching him and judging him. The wall had made his life a lie because it had hidden him from the "pale guys" and had hidden the "pale guys" from him. As much as any other single event in his life, this incident caused Trocmé to turn his back upon his class and to work with the poor.

The second major event before World War I was of even deeper significance to him than the look of the "pale guy." On a beautifully flowery Sunday in June 1911, André Trocmé's father killed his mother—or, at least, became morally responsible for her violent death.

Two months after his tenth birthday, Trocmé joined the family on an auto trip to their country home. Two of his brothers and a first cousin sat with him in the back seat, while his mother, wearing a veil, sat with his father in the front. His father had dismissed the chauffeur for the day and had decided to take the long road to their country place so that the family could see the fields in flower. At the very beginning of the trip, at the edge of Saint-Quentin, they found themselves at a closed level railroad crossing, and Papa started to get angry. As he slowed down approaching the crossing, his anger suddenly mounted—a ramshackle little car slipped around and in front of him. When the crossing was clear, the little car, as if out of spite, spun its wheels and threw clouds of dust upon the shiny limousine of the Trocmés. Paul Trocmé was furious. They came to a descent, and the tacot (jalopy) started to slow down, holding the exact middle of the road. The children in the back seat begged their father to sound his horn to get the little car to move over to the right. His frustration became uncontrollable when he realized that his horn was not working. He was going to pass that car.

As he came around it to the left, his wife took his arm and called out, "Paul, Paul, not so fast! There's going to be an accident!"
Suddenly there were the screams of people in terror, the feeling of a hammer blow on André's head, and then nothing but the crickets sounding in the fields and gasoline falling drop by drop somewhere nearby. The family pushed themselves out of the twisted iron of the car and stood in the road, with Papa holding his broken right fist in his left hand. They were all trembling and laughing wildly at being alive.

Then one of them saw Mama. But it was no longer she. It was a body on the road about thirty feet from the car, to the rear, a large body covered with dust, lying on its back with its legs slightly apart and with a thread of blood trickling down from the right corner of its mouth. The eyes were closed, and on the face, which was pointing up to the sky, was a proud, indifferent look, the look of what Trocmé, in retrospect, called the "thing," death.

Three days later, she was declared legally dead, but she never recovered consciousness, and for her son she had died on the road, sprawled on a little hill. When his father announced to the children, "Your mother is no more," André hugged him, and in his new ascendancy over his authoritarian father, he said, "Daddy, promise me you'll never have another car."

His father screamed, "I killed her! I killed her!" And Robert, André's older brother, came to him, embraced him, and kissed him.

Until the moment when he saw his mother sprawled on the rise in the road, his home had been "deep as a cradle," to use his own phrase. A heavy-legged, clumsy, big blond boy, he had felt especially close to his mother. Later, when he remembered his relationship with her, it seemed that he had not existed in his own right before she died. He was a part of her soft body, swept into her being by her kisses, by the music she played for him on the piano, and by the love she bore him. Now he was alive and she was a "thing." Death and solitude became for the first time in his life—and for the rest of his life—as real as anything else in the world, as present, as insistent, and as close to him as his need to take the next breath of air.

Trocmé never knew whether there was life after death, whether there was a Heaven or a Hell where souls separated from their bodies go to spend eternity. Later his honesty about his ignorance would hamper his ministry, since he would not console survivors with assurances about meeting their loved ones "up there." Death for him was loss, the loss of a dear person now replaced by the "thing."

Here is how he summarized, many years later, the effect of her death upon his life:

If I have sinned so much, if I have been, since then, so solitary, if my soul has taken such a swirling and solitary movement, if I have doubted everything, if I have been a fatalist, and have been a pessimistic child who awaits death every day, and who almost seeks it out, if I have opened myself slowly and late to happiness, and if I am still a sombre man, incapable of laughing whole-heartedly, it is because you left me that June 24th upon that road.

But if I have believed in eternal realities, in things that are beyond The Thing, if I have thrust myself toward them, it is also because I was alone, because you were no longer there to be my God, to fill my heart with your abundant and dominating life.

What an expression this is of a man's awareness that a human life is infinitely precious! Just as suffocating can show us the preciousness of air, her death showed him the preciousness of her life.

André Trocmé firmly believed that his father was morally responsible for her death: in effect, he had killed her, as far as the son was concerned. But the son still loved the father, and he hugged him and forgave him when he cried, "I killed her! I killed her!" Trocmé's first encounter with death was at the same time an encounter with his need to forgive lovingly the "killer." In the same event he learned the preciousness of the victim's life and the preciousness of the slayer's life. For the rest of his life—except for one moment in 1939, when he thought of assassinating Hitler—he would eschew the vicious circle of revenge. The loss death
inflicted was too awesome to be perpetrated upon any human being. Life was too precious—all human life.

2.

André Trocmé grew to young manhood within the barbed-wire boundaries of a city about twenty miles from where the battle of the Somme took place in July 1916, when he was fifteen years old. Between September 1914 and February 1917, the German Army, which was occupying the city of Saint-Quentin, almost bled the city to death. Inside the barbed wire that surrounded the city stood German sentinels who demanded signed permits from anyone wishing to leave. And there were many who wished to do so; the food supply was utterly inadequate, and people were trying to leave the city in order to buy food from the surrounding farms.

In February of 1917, the Trocmé family left Saint-Quentin as refugees from an almost dead city. They entered Belgium, and André learned the pain of hunger and the dark misery of begging food from the poorest of the poor. But he learned also what integrity was. For a while he was left to study the sciences with a Belgian Catholic priest. Being interested in religion, he tried to talk about that subject with the priest. Each time he tried, the priest became red with anger and immediately left the room. He had made a vow that he would not talk about religion with his young Protestant charges, and he was going to keep that vow.

Years later in Le Chambon, Trocmé would have Jewish children studying with him and with other Protestants. In the spirit of this priest, he would encourage the Jewish children to observe their own holidays, and he—as well as Theis—would refuse to allow any children to be converted to Christianity behind the backs of their parents. His relationship with the priest was the beginning of a long train of experiences that would result in his adopting the following principle: Help must never be given for the sake of propaganda; help must be given only for the benefit of the people being helped, not for the benefit of some church or other organization that was doing the helping. The life and integrity of the person helped were more precious than any organization. And so Trocmé would never try to convert the Jewish refugees who came in need to Le Chambon.

One of the reasons for his curiosity about religious matters was that in his father’s house there was, in the end, only one prayer: “Teach us to do our duty.” Morning, afternoon, and even there was always prayer in the mansion, and there was frequent Bible reading and meditation. On Sundays the older brother went to the temple twice. But theirs was a religion of duty toward a distant God. “Teach us to do our duty” became a formula that kept the individuals in the household from communicating their own feelings to each other, or seemed to make it unnecessary for them to do so. From the lips of that severe Huguenot, his father, the prayer came to the son like a word heard from a great distance in cold, crisp air across acres of snow. The sound was clear, but the feeling was not there.

In the midst of the war, and in the desert of his own solitude, André Trocmé had become a member of the Union of Saint-Quentin. The union was a Protestant organization of young people, almost all of whom were the children of laborers. They met in a bare old room above the entrance door of the temple; all that was in the room was a table and chairs. They conducted their own services: the intimacy of their friendship, either at the table talking about the Bible, or on their knees, often in tears, praying aloud to God to be saved from lying or from sexual impurity. When one of them thanked God for deliverance from some sin or some misfortune, the rest of the group gathered around him in a shared joy. If a problem persisted, they begged God to increase their love for each other so that they could help the miserable one to recover his spiritual well-being.

For André Trocmé, this place and this group were paradise on earth. He no longer had to hide his deep fears or regrets from
stern, powerful adults. He could tell everything to his young
friends and to their God.

Looking back as a sixty-year-old man to those months in the
union before the Trocmés became refugees from Saint-Quentin,
he was sure that he believed more in the union than he did in the
power of God. Here he learned to feel the power of human
solidarity. It was to the union that he preached his first short
sermons with his elbows squeezed tightly against his big-boned,
clumsy body. And it was in the union that he conquered day by
day the timidity that solitude had created in him. Around him now
was not an alien world but young people in passionate commu-
nion with each other’s fears and hopes.

But the adolescents in the union did not erect their own walls.
In the autumn of 1916, after the Germans had held their positions
in the battle of the Somme nearby, the occupants of Saint-Quen-
tin started to build the Hindenburg Line, the precursor of the
French Maginot Line of World War II. In order to do this, they
used Russian prisoners, who lived in cold, starvation, and filth in
camps situated inside Saint-Quentin. Hungry themselves, the
Germans starved their prisoners cruelly while working them to
death to build their line of subterranean fortifications. It was not
an extraordinary event when one of those Russians, thin as skin
on bones, dropped in a faint upon the cobblestones and was
either kicked by a German soldier or shot through the head on the
spot.

It was forbidden to do anything to help them, but the teenagers
of the union did so nonetheless. Every day they brought a large
potful of vegetables they had managed to collect into the prison
camp (with the help of a compassionate German sentinel), and
they distributed the food to the Russian prisoners. Before they
left, they passed among the prisoners with cigar butts and fistfuls
of tobacco they had found in their homes or on the streets or the
floors of public places. Occasionally one of them was caught and
imprisoned for eight days for having communicated with the
Russians. Always they left the camp hating the Germans. Even the

half-German André, who had loved his own German relatives
gratefully for their love, could not suppress his angry hate
against them.

He had not yet found a consistent attitude toward all hum-
beings, had not come to regard all human beings as precious, he
had departed forever from the “Trocmé people.” For the rest
of his life he sought another union, another intimate commun
of people praying together and finding in their love for each oth-
and for God the passion and the will to extinguish indifference
and solitude. From the union he learned that only in such an
intimate community, in a home or in a village, could the Prote-
tant idea of a “priesthood of all believers” work. Only in intima-
could people save each other.

And because he learned this well, the struggle of Le Chambon
against evil would be a kitchen struggle, a battle between a com-
munity of intimates and a vast, surrounding world of violen-
betrayal, and indifference. Le Chambon would be, at least durin
the first four years of the 1940s, the union he sought.

3.

During the last months of the war, after the Trocmés came bac-
from their exile, Saint-Quentin was like a sprawling hospital. The
smells of chemicals and of rotting flesh were everywhere, and a
night, trains full of bodies from the front crossed the city to the
places where the bodies were to be incinerated. With all this, the
hatred of the French toward their German occupiers grew more
and more bitter; but in the midst of all this, André Trocmé began
to have a fundamental, single attitude toward mankind—includ-
ing the enemies of France, his mother’s compatriots, the Ger-
mans.

One day he saw coming toward him a straggling column of
wounded German soldiers. The Germans were losing the war,
and, lacking transportation, the wounded had to drag their bro-
The boy’s face brightened slightly—the man was using words he had often heard and uttered throughout his young life.

“At Breslau we found Christ,” the soldier went on, “and we have given him our life.” Then he told Trocmé about a certain sect to which he now belonged.

The soldier said, “Men cannot hurt those who have put all their confidence in God. One day a man who hated the work of our sect came into the meeting hall to kill our leader, but his pistol misfired, and we all knew this was a sign from Heaven.”

Standing there on the staircase with his hand on the young man’s arm, he went on, “I shall not kill your brother; I shall kill no Frenchman. God has revealed to us that a Christian must not kill, ever. We never carry arms.”

“But how can that be?” the boy asked. “After all, you are a soldier.”

“Well, I explained all this to my captain, and he has allowed me to go into battle without arms. Usually, telegraphers like me carry a pistol—or a bayonet, at least. I have nothing. I am often in danger when I am in the lines, but then I sing a hymn and I pray to God. If He has decided to keep me alive, He will. If not . . .”

André Trocmé had met his first conscientious objector. Perhaps if the soldier had been French, the boy would have been indignant at him for refusing to defend his country when André’s brother was out there fighting for it and for his own life. But here was a German simply refusing to do what he saw as an immoral job. The courage and faith of the man were plain, and the boy invited Kindler (that was his name) to come to the union for the next Sunday service. Kindler accepted the invitation.

Earlier in the war, the boy had walked across Saint-Quentin with some of his German relatives, shamelessly speaking German with them before his French compatriots. His warmhearted relatives had come to the city toward the beginning of the German occupation of Saint-Quentin to bring the Trocmés much-needed food and clothing. These walks had been an agony for the patriotic young Frenchman. Now he was walking across the city.
at the side of a uniformed German soldier. But something was
different—he was beginning to feel that every human being em-
body something precious.

When they entered the bare hall of the union, his companions
showed their surprise at seeing him bring a German soldier to
their services. But when he explained, in the simple language of
Kindler himself, that this man was a true Christian, and that he
would kill no one because he obeyed Jesus Christ, they immedi-
ately adopted Kindler as one of their number, like the believing
children they all were.

After the service, Kindler spoke to them briefly about his con-
version in Breslau and about his life in the front lines. André
Trocmé translated. Then Kindler taught them a little hymn that
Trocmé never forgot. The hymn was not hard to remember. It
went:

Hallelujah Hallelujah,
Hallelujah Amen.
Hallelujah Hallelujah,
Hallelujah Amen!

Perhaps this was the hymn Kindler sang in battle. In any case, in
a moment they were all singing it together at the tops of their
voices, like eager, happy children.

Then they all knelt down together on the bare floor and prayed
(Kindler in German). This was the first time in André Trocmé’s
life that he told his most intimate thoughts to God in a loud, clear
voice. The German’s love and courage had kindled in him a love
and a courage that had been waiting for a spark to ignite them.

After the simple Protestant ceremony, Kindler gave him some
papers and other private possessions and said that he had to go
to the front but he would try to return to pick up his things. “If
I am wounded,” he said, “or if I am made a prisoner, you will hear
from me. If I return home, you will hear from me, too. But if you
do not hear from me, send these things to my wife at the address
I have written on this paper. If you do not hear from me, it is

because God has judged it right to take me unto Himself.”

No word ever came from Kindler. After a while, the lad sent
Kindler’s possessions to his family.

The attitude of nonviolence toward all human beings came to
André Trocmé from many sources: his mother’s death, which
showed him the horrible power of death, his friendships in the
union, the sight of that poor monster of a German with a jaw of
rags from which hung clots of blood, his own reading of the
Sermon on the Mount, and many other experiences. But in its
depths his nonviolence stayed as simple as Kindler’s; it was an
attitude toward people, not a carefully argued theological posi-
tion. In its depths it was personal; it had to do with the persons
he had known, and these persons were mainly his mother, that
stumbling monster, and Kindler. Years later, he would study
theology in Paris and New York, and he would work to develop
persuasive arguments for pacifism. But this work would be pri-
marily for the sake of convincing others. In his own mind, nonvi-
olence was completely expressed in words as simple and direct as
Kindler’s when he said to the boy, “One must refuse to shoot.
Christ taught us to love our enemies. That is His good news, that
we should help, not hurt each other, and anything you add to this
comes from the Devil!”

After the war, with Saint-Quentin in ruins, the Trocmé family
moved to Paris, where André passed his baccalauréat, the examina-
tions that qualified him for work in the universities of France. He
studied theology at the University of Paris (and there met Édou-
ard Theis), joined an international pacifist organization, the Fel-
lowship of Reconciliation, and began his work with unions in the
suburbs of Paris. As in Saint-Quentin, the unions around Paris
were usually groups of poor people who prayed together and
worked together. Always, because of the “pale guy,” he stayed
clear of the wealthy bourgeoisie among whom most of his relatives moved.

Having won a scholarship to Union Theological Seminary in New York City, he decided to go to America to study the practical, optimistic Social Gospel that was then dominant there. His decision to go was influenced by a desire to live a life apart from the “Trocmé people.”

But once in New York City he found the Social Gospel too secular, too rational for his deeply devout mind. The Social Gospel may be summarized by George Bernard Shaw’s quip: “The only trouble with Christianity is that it has never yet been tried.” It was an attempt to turn people away from useless words about the “nature of God,” and about some distant “Heaven,” and to make them give their attention to trying to make this world, this life, a scene of loving, rewarding cooperation among human beings. It wanted men and women to use the physical and social sciences to make human beings masters and possessors of nature, and conquerors of disease and poverty. And it despised those religious leaders who were content to leave society as corrupt as they found it, if only they could be permitted to conduct their services and their theological ramblings in the odor of sanctity. As much as the Marxists did, they despised the religion that is the opiate of the people, that makes people passive instruments and victims of a society that exploits the poor.

On all these counts, as he would agree with the Marxists in the internment camp near Limoges, so Trocmé agreed with the proclaimers of the Social Gospel. For him, religion was a revolutionary force, driving people to bring loving cooperation into every aspect of social life. But both the Communists and the Social Gospel people lacked one element that was central in André Trocmé’s mind: the person-to-God piety that every adolescent in the Union of Saint-Quentin felt, and that Kindler felt. For Trocmé, only this intimate relationship between a faithful person and God, only a person’s conscious obedience to the demands of God, could arouse and direct the powers that could make the world better than it is. All their talk about the power of sciences to transform the world into a paradise was empty talk. André Trocmé. For him there was no paradise where God was not to be heard “walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”

And so André Trocmé was alienated and lonely at Union Theological Seminary in 1925. Besides, he found the American language a bouillie (soup) of melted-together sounds emerging from somewhere between the throats and the noses of these all-too-optimistic and all-too-worldly people. He gave up trying to distinguish their way of pronouncing “Newark” from their way of pronouncing “New York,” and he took a job as a French tutor to the children of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. He took the job not only because he needed money—he was financially independent of his father—but also because he thought teaching American boys and French might help him with his own American English. And so, enough, Winthrop and David Rockefeller, the boys he was tutoring, helped him a great deal toward understanding and speaking the language.

His brief relationship with John D. Rockefeller, Sr., frustrated him in the special way that the Americans at Union Theological Seminary were frustrating him with their Social Gospel. He was touched when on Christmas of 1925, after dinner, the founder of Standard Oil sang with a shaking voice and tears running down his cheeks some old Baptist hymns (one of them was “He Leadeth Me”). The singing seemed to open up the wells of a deep piety that lay in the man, a piety for which Trocmé was thirsty even after only a few months in America.

But to talk with “Grandpa” was a different matter. Trocmé remembered him as an almost fleshless body seated in a red chair and wearing a white wig. The first thing he ever said to the young man was: “You Frenchmen don’t pay your debts. I always pay my debts.” (France had not yet paid off her war debts to the United States.) Then the old man told him that if he would like to be rich, he must always pay his debts. Taking a dime from his purse, he told Trocmé that he was now establishing his fortu
“Promise me,” he said, “that you'll invest this money as soon as you are back home."

At the end of this first meeting, the old man said to him, “More gasoline and higher prices—that's what we want.”

What a strange doctrine he has! thought Trocmé. He never could understand those Americans—religious or not—who believed that when they had succeeded, they had learned how to solve all the problems of the world. The advocates of the Social Gospel were an instance of this strange belief.

But not all of his encounters with the social ethic of success were this baffling. It was in New York City in the fall of 1925 that he met Magda Grilli. When he first met her in the cafeteria of International House, he did not find her beautiful, but he did notice her candor and her simple-hearted, intelligent way of addressing people. But as the days passed and he began to see her as magnificent with her bright forehead and her deep, dark eyes, he began to fear her presence at the same time that he was yearning to see her.

At the age of twenty-four he had had no sexual experience, and he was committed to remaining chaste until marriage. Chastity was vital to his religious life, not only because he was imitating Christ’s chastity but also because chastity tested his Trocméan self-control. He had a boiling, sensual nature and often used showers, baths, and exercise to help him keep it from spilling over into sexual action. Once, in Paris, he had thrown a bucket of dirty water on the head of a girl who was pursuing him. Usually he dared not even look at women, especially attractive ones, except in his dreams.

One day he heard Magda (who was still “mademoiselle” to him) say in her rapid way to one of their friends, “Go quickly and get your sweater. You need it.” That command made Trocmé think, Here is a person who cares for others on their own terms, not in order to parade her own virtues, but in order to keep them well. In the many years to follow, he would see how poignantly Magda felt the cold in the bodies of others, and how she would spend much of their lives covering or uncovering children. At the moment, all he could see was that she quite simply cared for others, cared both emotionally and in action.

If there is one image that best symbolizes the relationship of Magda Grilli Trocmé to other people, it is this concern of her for the physical comfort of people. When you cover somebody with a blanket or a sweater, you are not seeking that person’s spiritual salvation; you are concerned only for his or her bodily welfare. And when you cover people, you are allowing their own heat to warm their bodies under that blanket or sweater; you are not intruding on those bodies. You are only permitting them to keep well by their own body heat. In this image of covering lie the essence of Magda’s way of caring for others.

They took to walking alone, without their friends from International House, and Magda told him of her early Catholic upbringing in Florence, of her need for liberation from the convent in which she had been placed, and of her not being a Protestant or a Catholic because she believed membership in these or any other sects distracted one from the essentials of the religious life, which had to do with loving one’s fellow human beings. And she told him that she was studying to be a social worker so that she could stay close to those essentials.

What might well have angered Trocmé if it had come from the lips of a theologian of the Social Gospel at Union Theological Seminary made his heart leap when it came from Magda’s lips. But there were problems. First of all, he had heard her criticize an ascetic friend of theirs for his commitment to poverty, and Trocmé himself was committed to a life working in unions of poor people. She wanted a normal, reasonable married life, and he was not at all sure that their life together could be such a life. Besides she was on the edge of faith and was critical of all churches. Would she become the wife of a pastor, and if she would, could their life together be happy?

On the morning of April 18, 1926, after standing silently for a while with her near the 125th Street ferry, he asked her to marry...
him, saying, "I shall be a Protestant pastor, and I want to live a life of poverty. I am a conscientious objector, and that could mean prison as well as all sorts of difficulties." She accepted him, and they sealed their promise to marry with a prayer he uttered aloud as they walked on the rocks of the Palisades.

A few months later, despite the offer of a scholarship from Union Theological Seminary and an invitation from the Rockefeller to spend a year with them in the United States, the couple were standing on the deck of a boat, on their way to France and their wedding.

André had not especially liked America with all its secularism, but Magda had enjoyed the spontaneity of the Americans and had especially enjoyed sharing their freedom, a freedom she had been cheated of all her life in Florence. And so these two stood together on the deck with different emotions, but clinging to each other, as New York disappeared. They would have different emotions and would cling to each other until he died.

5.

Trocmé was faithful to the promise he made when he proposed to Magda: "I shall be a Protestant pastor, and I want to live a life of poverty." Their first parish was in Maubeuge, one of the ugliest industrial cities of northern France, and their parishioners were poor industrial laborers.

Their first child, Nelly, was born there in a burst of blood that almost killed Magda; it was André's brother Francis, a physician, who saved her life. Watching her struggling to survive the shock of losing so much blood so swiftly, André noticed for the first time in his life what he called his "psychological egoism." He realized how in the secret, dark places of his mind he was rejoicing in his own health while he was watching Magda sink toward death. He saw that even at such a time the healthy person, no matter how much he loved the ill one, asked himself what he would do when the other was gone, and even found himself making his own plans for a life without her.

When she recovered, stronger than ever after the birth of her healthy daughter, she was not shocked to hear about psychological egoism; she had long ago accepted the fact that people are creatures who desire to stay alive at least as much as they desire to help others stay alive. But André was still a child of the Union of Saint-Quentin. He had to learn with a shock that even people who loved each other could be separate from each other.

There was a deep streak of mysticism in him, a feeling that love could produce a perfect union of two beings. And though he learned about psychological egoism, he never entirely lost this mystical feeling. Magda saw that if he gave way to it his life would be one of ecstasy and not of action; instead of helping others, he would embrace them in ineffectual passion. And so throughout their early married life Magda helped him in his struggle to avoid what he came to call the "abyss of mysticism." Her unfailing common sense held him back from the abyss of useless passion.

In their next parish he came as close to mysticism as he ever would. After a year in Maubeuge, in the fall of 1928, the Trocmés moved to Sin-le-Noble near the Belgian border of northern France, and in this city, which was as ugly as Maubeuge, they spent six years before leaving for Le Chambon.

It was mainly in the kitchens of the homes of poor miners that André Trocmé carried on his ministry in Sin-le-Noble. Other ministers there had spent much time entertaining in the presbytery or enjoying the cultural activities of nearby Douai, but not the Trocmés. Like the Communists, with whom they were always competing for the allegiance of the industrial workers, they loved a life sans fard (without cosmetics). They found that life sitting and reading and talking in people's homes, and sometimes praying on their knees together there.

One of the small groups that Trocmé worked with was called the Men's Circle. It was made up entirely of poor people, some of whom were struggling with one of the cruelest enemies of
their class, alcoholism. One evening, sitting in a worker’s kitchen with the Men’s Circle, Trocmé was discussing a book that was very influential at the time, a book that tried to prove that Jesus was a myth invented by Saint Paul. He found himself mustering the arguments and facts he had learned at the University of Paris, but while he was doing so, and, in the process, successfully refuting the book, he also found himself asking the question: “If Jesus really walked upon this earth, why do we keep treating him as if he were a disembodied, impossibly idealistic ethical theory? If he was a real man, then the Sermon on the Mount was made for people on this earth; and if he existed, God has shown us in flesh and blood what goodness is for flesh-and-blood people.”

All of this he said calmly to the ten men who were present. He had not planned to say these things, nor had he planned to take any particular action after their talk, but suddenly they found themselves on their knees together. Each made a confession to God of his own weaknesses, as the young people in Saint-Quentin had done, and they all stood up. They found themselves looking at each other with new eyes, without defensiveness, shyness, or pride. They all felt the spirit of God in them, and decided to go right home to bring that extraordinary new awareness to their wives and children.

This was the beginning of what came to be called the “awakening at Sin-le-Noble.” In its full intensity it lasted for more than three months, and in the course of it, all the divisions and disputes in the parish disappeared. People became as dear to each other as Jesus was to them. For Trocmé it was “a spiritual springtime. All those things that had formerly been vague, colorless, seen from the outside . . . became suddenly for me living, interesting, inspiring. Each man became inestimably precious in my eyes.”

But the “awakening” was not only ecstatic; it involved action. It was not unlike the musical or poetic inspiration that makes some people productive geniuses. Such inspiration is not like a mystical trance; it raises people above their ordinary levels of energy, so that, celebrating, they rush out to meet and to chart the world around them. Such an inspiration motivated the H sites in fifteenth-century Czechoslovakia, and the Quakers in seventeenth-century Pennsylvania. They had what Trocmé called a morale de combat (an ethic of combat), an active way of living the world.

The word good sometimes carries with it connotations of vapidity. Good children, like good examples, fit neatly and quietly into the patterns others have laid down upon them. I narrator in André Gide’s modern novel The Immoralist has “honest folk” because he felt that in them there were “untouched treasures somewhere lying covered up, hidden, smothered culture and decency and morality.” But Trocmé found the treasures then and for the rest of his life only in an ethic of combat. For the rest of his life, imitating the love of Jesus, mankind would be for Trocmé a grande aventure (the greatest adventures). For Trocmé, the “untouched treasures” of great energy were not smothered by morality; they were revealed by and by it alone.

There is no more striking example in Trocmé’s early life of power of this aggressive ethic than the story of Célisse. The story starts during the time of the “awakening.” One night the rov squad of the Men’s Circle found a man dead drunk, lying in a ditch. The man was Flemish (Sin-le-Noble is only a few miles from Belgium), with a big, square head, the neck of a bull, and very long hands. The circle knew him; like most of the alcoholics in the industrial community, he was destroying his mind and body and brutalizing his family. His wife’s skin was gray from suffering, fear, and hunger; it was she above all others who felt the full force of his violent temper and of his cruel neglect. Piece by piece, had sold almost all of their furniture for drink, and though they had a decent little house on the outskirts of Sin-le-Noble, the Trocmé and the squad entered it, they found the usual home a drunkard: almost completely empty rooms, and children ly
in a corner on a pile of rags, with terror in every line of their faces and bodies.

Under Trocmé's influence, Célisse stopped drinking, visited people, prayed with them, and labored to convince his fellow miners to take the Blue Cross oath against drink. He became the single most effective force in the whole circle for saving people from the hell of drunkenness and anger and remorse. All the power in his mighty body and simple mind was turned toward saving people from destruction, and he blossomed during it all, like a great sunflower.

One day a group from the circle was singing hymns and passing out religious tracts to the miners as they left the pits on their way home for the evening. As was the custom, Trocmé started to make a little speech. Suddenly a small man in a cap joined the group (the “pale guy” of Trocmé’s youth was always there, it seems, watching and judging him). In a cutting voice he cried out, “Hey! I know you—you scab! The priests pay you to tell lies. God? There’s no God. If there were a God, he would strike me dead right now when I yell ‘Shit!’ to him. Shut your damned mouth.”

Slowly Célisse left his group of friends in the circle. He rolled as he walked, like an athlete, top-heavy with all that bone and muscle. As he walked toward him, the little man in the cap started retreating, yelling all the while. Trocmé had stopped talking, and they were all listening to Célisse and his thundering voice: “What are you saying, you idiot? That there’s no God? Repeat that one more time, if you dare, just one more time that there is no God. Have you seen Célisse, eh? Who stopped him from drinking? I’ll show you if there’s a God!” And Célisse dropped his coat on the road, while the cries of the little man were growing fainter and fainter under the onslaught. But though his cries were getting weaker, they still continued, and Trocmé and the others watched in horror as Célisse raised that fist of his to smite the little man. Only Trocmé’s sudden leap saved the blasphemer from being struck to the ground.

“Let me do it,” yelled Célisse. “I’ll show him that there’s God. These bums, that’s the only thing that’ll convince them. Trocmé forbade him to strike, and Célisse, baffled, obeyed. O the way back from the exit of the mine, Trocmé tried to explain nonviolence to Célisse, but the pastor’s explanation served only to confuse him. He could not understand how nonviolence could be effective. “With such bums there’s no other way,” he kept muttering all the way home.

At the end of six years in Sin-le-Noble, the Trocmé family left Jean-Pierre, Jacques, and Daniel had been born there, and the had often been seriously ill in that damp and dirty air. Except for one Belgian family, every one of Trocmé’s parishioners had bee tubercular at one time or another, and the children were especially vulnerable.

But their reason for leaving Sin-le-Noble was not only physica. In the Reformed Church of France it was forbidden to preach nonviolence. A preacher could speak about pacifism privately but never from the pulpit. In fact, a declared pacifist could not become a preacher; Trocmé had been ordained a short while before this provision was passed by the national synod. He had been feeling more and more stifled by the prohibition against preaching pacifism, and was hoping that he could find a little parish where such preaching would not be so plainly visible to the national synod as it was in Sin-le-Noble.

The day in 1934 when the family of six left, Célisse, his wife and his children appeared all washed and combed in the presbytery. That good-bye, so full of love and sadness, was one of the most memorable and heartbreaking events in Trocmé’s life. At one of the reasons it was so painful to Trocmé was that short after the Trocmés left, Célisse started to drink again and committed suicide.

For Trocmé, that suicide, horrible as it was, and against his principle of nonviolence, was a statement of Célisse’s integrity. With Trocmé gone, he could not restrain his desire to drink. God required him to stop drinking, and so did his friend Trocmé; b
he could not stop without Trocmé near. The pastor had not been able to teach him to be nonviolent, but he had inspired him to obey God’s commands uncompromisingly. To do this now, he had to leave this life, just as Trocmé had to leave Sin-le-Noble and go to the tiny village of Le Chambon to obey his principles uncompromisingly.

6.

When that refugee called Trocmé the “soul of Le Chambon,” she meant that his was the driving force that made Le Chambon the safest place in Europe for refugees. Without knowing it, she was praising him for living up to his morale de combat, his aggressive celebration of life. She was saying that he had brought this celebration to Le Chambon, just as he had brought it to Célisse.

But he did not give it to Célisse and he would not give it to Le Chambon in the way that one gives money to the poor or gifts to friends. Trocmé gave his aggressive ethic to them by giving them himself. Aside from the distinction between good and evil, between helping and hurting, the fundamental distinction of that ethic is between giving things and giving oneself. When you give somebody a thing without giving yourself, you degrade both parties by making the receiver utterly passive and by making yourself a benefactor standing there to receive thanks—and even sometimes obedience—as repayment. But when you give yourself, nobody is degraded—in fact, both parties are elevated by a shared joy. When you give yourself, the things you are giving become, to use Trocmé’s word, féconde (fertile, fruitful). What you give creates new, vigorous life, instead of arrogance on the one hand and passivity on the other.

The giving of oneself is an utterly personal action because each self is a unique person. For Trocmé, giving himself meant “That smile... that smile!” as one refugee put it, and it meant a wide embrace because he was such a passionately loving man. One

refugee compared his presence to a moving performance of Beethoven’s Eroica that made you rise to your own highest levels of generosity and joy. This is why Célisse became his best self when he received that gift, and Le Chambon became its best self with his presence.

But there was to be a profound difference between Célisse and Le Chambon: Célisse, with all his physical strength and all his loyalty, was not strong enough to receive Trocmé’s vigorous ethic into his own life. He could not live his life without the beneficent gushing of Trocmé’s physical presence. His suicide showed that he was utterly dependent upon Trocmé. But Magda Trocmé, Édouard Theis, and the other people of Le Chambon were strong enough to receive his gift of self and go on in their own ways. They could bear to live, on their own, the strenuous ethic he brought when he brought himself to them. They had a power far greater than the power of poor Célisse; they could live a life of moral high adventure on their own, as the last year of the Occupation showed, when Trocmé was fleeing from the Gestapo far away from Le Chambon. It takes more for a Trocmé to succeed than just a Trocmé. It takes also a Le Chambon.
Chambon, and in that house he began writing his novel \textit{Plague}. In some ways the story of Le Chambon is a companion piece to this novel. In both stories there is a leader to whom saving lives is dedicated; in both stories not only courage but also the wisdom of realizing, comprehending the horror of dying, plays a central role in the leader's mind and in the minds of his closest associates. Trocmé saw more clearly than anybody else in Chambon the danger to the refugees, and he saw with equal clarity that they must be saved by nonviolent means if they were to be saved at all. In \textit{The Plague}, Dr. Rieux (with the help of his friend Tarrou) clearly saw the dangers of the plague and saw with equal clarity how to organize the city of Oran to fight them. Both men knew that the plague of mankind's desire to kill, or, more usually, man's willingness to allow killing to happen without resisting it. And in both stories the plague disappears as terribly as it came, point by point, killing a person here and a person there, and then subsiding.

Of course, as companion pieces should be, the two stories are different. One is fiction, and the other is true; one is main story of a committed atheist, and the other is mainly the story of a committed Christian. But the two stories are about the same thing: saving lives in a dangerous time, and they are about the same things. Rieux's closest friend, Tarrou, describes as the "good man who infects hardly anyone" with the microbe of hatred and indifference. And they are about how one may fight death or front and be struck by death on another. In the novel, the death of the doctor's friend dies a few days before the plague is past. So does the doctor's wife, even though she has long left plague-stricken Oran. In the story of Le Chambon, the eldest, close friend of André Trocmé, Jean-Pierre, died less than a month before liberation of Le Chambon. In both stories, death comes as a surprise into the intimate life of the "good man."
2.

When, shortly after the landing in Normandy, Trocmé came back to Le Chambon, it looked as if the village were another Célisse: it seemed to have been committing suicide in his absence. True, the Germans, sensing the coming of defeat, had escalated violence in the area by shooting at unidentified moving civilian vehicles, by killing hostages, and by threatening the whole Haute-Loire department with Metzger’s Tartar Legion, those Asiatic-Russian prisoners who had been captured on the Russian Front by the Germans, and who had been dressed in SS uniforms and trained to murder civilians without mercy. But whatever the provocation—and the civil war that was boiling up between Frenchmen was a part of that provocation—it seemed at first glance that Le Chambon had in his absence committed itself to living and dying by the sword. Many of the young men of the Cévenol School had joined the Maquis and were helping them use the new plastic explosive that could stick on railroad tracks or bridges and blow them up. And in the mountains of Haute-Loire, young men and women, working with hardened Maquisards or new bandwagon “patriots,” were ambushing German troops.

But a few minutes’ conversation with Magda in the presbytery showed him how misleading appearances were. Le Chambon was not another Célisse. Magda and her equally aggressive friend Simone Mairese, whom she had known in their first parish in Maubeuge, had turned Le Chambon into one of the most important underground railroad stations in the south of France. The two women had been welcoming ever-increasing numbers of refugees into the presbytery and into the various types of shelters in Le Chambon. The houses of Le Chambon were always full, and Cimade teams were busier than ever making room in Le Chambon for new refugees.

Mildred Theis, in her quiet, endlessly generous way, helped keep the Cévenol School a hospitable place for refuge and so had the remarkable faculty of that school. In the village itself, the women who led the pensions and the private homes had been taking in more and more refugees with fewer and fewer funds for feeding them; and in the countryside, the Darbystes and others were helping the women of the town to “maintain a spirit of peace in the parish and the village,” as Theis described it more than thirty years later. And it was the same sort of peace that Le Chambon had had with Trocmé and Theis there—not peace of retreat, but the peace the Chambonnais felt in living conscientiously, in taking, as Camus puts it in The Plague, “victims’ side, so as to reduce the damage done.” Happy Anniv, Trocmé! To have such friends after poor Célisse!

3.

But death, like the biological microbe of inguinal fever Camus’s Oran, was in the air of Le Chambon. It was as if during those “astonishing weeks,” as Trocmé later called them in his notes, man’s murderous intentions infected the atmosphere of Chambon and became depersonalized but stayed murderous. People died because of something in the atmosphere, something we can dismiss with the word accident, but something that must be looked at more closely if we would understand both Le Chambon and certain of the people of Le Chambon as they were during those weeks.

One floor of the boardinghouse of Madame Barraud had been requisitioned by the Maquis for young Maquisards who had gone into the organization to avoid forced labor in Germany but who were now unable to get back to their homes to fight with Maquisards in their own regions because trains were not moving regularly, bridges were blown up, and the dangers in the countryside were too great.
Madame Barraud had four children, one of whom, Madeleine ("Manou"), was eighteen years old. Manou had tiny, efficient hands that seemed able to do anything speedily and perfectly. She was a close friend of Jean-Pierre Trocmé, though he was four years her junior. Madame Barraud did not approve of their friendship. It seemed to her that Jean-Pierre was even more violent than his father, the pastor of Le Chambon; there was a driving force within the two Trocmés that frightened some of the people who knew them intimately. Madame Barraud felt that just as André Trocmé had led the village into harm's way with his powerful passions and firm will, so Jean-Pierre might lead her daughter, Madeleine, into danger. Madame Barraud, like others in Le Chambon, had followed André Trocmé down a dangerous path because she knew that it was her path too, her only way to go, a path of helpful, unsentimental love. But she was far from sure about Jean-Pierre, whose anger sometimes seemed unbridled to her. He was not a good Boy Scout, an important organization in the village, and he disliked going to temple. Manou, on the other hand, was devoted to the Scouts, especially the louveteaux (Cub Scouts), and was deeply pious. Manou had very strong feelings against the Germans and had more than once been dangerously outspoken against French girls who had anything to do with German soldiers. The girl might be led into a drastic act by the wild Jean-Pierre.

But one day Madame Barraud discovered what sorts of things the two adolescents did together. One of their most frequent activities was that of bringing food and wood to the old people in the village who could not get about. They took a special pleasure in finding coffee for them. And they were only comrades, not lovers—Jean-Pierre was too young, though he looked a bit older than his fourteen years, and Manou loved another young man, who was away fighting with the Maquis. The two shared one passion, aside from their passionate dislike for the German occupants of France: a passion to help. The French phrase *toujours prête à servir* (always ready to help). Dr. Rie, who was one of the sponsors of the Scouts in the area, said that of all the Scouts, Manou was the only one who was always ready to help, with those golden hands of hers and that slender, dark-eyed face. And everybody in Le Chambon knew her well used this phrase, the highest accolade the Chambonnais can give, about her. Jean-Pierre was also *toujours prêt* (always ready), but more erratically, more impulsively.

In early July of that last summer of the Occupation, on a splendid day just before the golden flowers of the genêts started dying away, Madame Barraud took some children from outside Chambon for a long walk around the village and into the countryside. She had invited her daughter to come with her, but Manou had already committed herself to taking care of some Cub Scouts.

Manou finished her duties early and returned to the Barraud boardinghouse in the center of the village. Since it was July and there was no school, and since her high-spirited health demanded activity, she joined a young man who was a boarder in the house but not a Maquisard, on a tour of some of the empty rooms in the floor of the boardinghouse that had been requisitioned by the Maquis. Some of the Maquisards were away, and the two young people wanted to see their sometimes dangerous but always interesting possessions, which they would carelessly leave about their rooms.

Her young companion found a revolver that a Maquisard had left in the drawer of his night table. He picked it up, casually, and checked to see if there were bullets in the gun, and then playfully pointed the gun at Manou to frighten her. But there was a bullet in the chamber of the revolver, and when he pulled the trigger he shot Manou, hitting an artery. She died almost at once.

When Madame Barraud returned to her boardinghouse, some one ran up to her and cried, "Manou is wounded! Manou wounded!" She found her daughter dead.

When she saw that there was nothing she could do for her daughter, she immediately asked, "But where is Jean?" Jean saw
the boy who had shot her. Somebody had seen him run from the boardinghouse, his eyes wild with grief and self-hatred. Madame Barraud pursued him, took him back into the house, embraced and comforted him, and told him, “Jean, it is not your fault. It is not your fault. It is the fault of the war. We are all a bit mad. It is not your fault.”

When the temple funeral service was over, Madame Barraud looked around her, trying to find Jean. He was not in the temple. She knew that he could be in only one place, if he had not killed himself, and so she rushed to the fresh grave of her daughter. There he was, lying on the soil above her coffin, prostrate, sobbing. She took him in her arms and soothed him. Miss Maber, who knew Jean, told me about her efforts to console him. And then she added with her eyes shining and her body shaking off its customary English poise, “She was absolutely wonderful. I cannot say enough about how wonderful I think Madame Barraud was. She is a glorious woman.” The plague had struck, but the little Alsatian had remained “always ready, always ready to help.”

4.

About a month later, on August 13, 1944, the pastor and his wife went to visit a Swiss couple in Le Chambon. The couple had been attacking each other verbally with such bitterness that their marriage was in danger. The Trocmé went, as experts in marital turbulence, to help reconcile them, both to each other and to a moderate amount of domestic quarreling. During the latter part of the visit, Magda kept pressing André to leave early, but he wanted to stay so that they could eat the “cake of peace” with their Swiss friends. As they approached the presbytery, Magda said, “If only I do not arrive too late!” She does not know now, and believes that she never knew, why she uttered these words, but she was being drawn to the presbytery. Trocmé left her at the “poetic gate” and was walking back up the Rue de la Grande Fontaine to go to the temple when he heard one of his children calling after him, “Papa, Papa! Come quickly! Jean-Pierre has hanged himself!”

When he found him stretched on the floor of the bathroom, the boy was still warm and smiling mildly, as his beautifully proportioned, bronzed young body lay there, with only underdrawers on, dead. “I have just taken him down,” Magda said, in a voice as flat as death. And she went on, “Oh, but he was heavy! He tied the rope up there on a pipe. I don’t know how I got him down. He is warm! Go quickly! Get the doctor. Maybe he is still alive.”

But he was not breathing. For the Trocmé, who did not know about mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, he was dead. When Dr. Riou arrived, the boy was cold.

The evening before, Jean-Pierre had accompanied his parents to a recital by the distinguished actor Deschamps of François Villon’s poem “The Ballad of the Hanged.” The boy knew the poem by heart, and, mesmerized by Deschamps’s stiffening and swaying body and by his affecting rendition of the lines against an austerely simple background in the annex of the temple, he had begun to recite the verses along with Deschamps and had moved up the center aisle of the annex hall like a sleepwalker. It was the carefully considered opinion of Dr. Riou that at about four o’clock on the following afternoon, when Jean-Pierre was alone in the presbytery and depressed about a difficult Greek translation he was working on, and about not finding his friends at the Lignon, where they had agreed to swim together, he decided to pass the time by imitating Deschamps’s recital. He wanted to see how he as a hanged man would look swaying at the end of a rope, so he went to the bathroom, knotted a rope around the pipe, made a hangman’s noose with the other end, found a stool, stood on the stool before the bathroom mirror, and put the noose around his neck; then, while he was perhaps swaying and reciting the lines of Villon’s poem, his foot slipped and the noose pressed a nerve, rendering him unconscious before he could recover his footing. Unconscious, he was strangled. This was Dr.
Riou’s account. We shall never know with absolute certainty what happened in the lonely presbytery.

Of his four children, Jean-Pierre had been the closest to André Trocmé. His powerful imagination, which had, in all likelihood, brought about his death, his immense sensitivity—he was an accomplished pianist and a vigorous young poet—brought him close to his restless father. One day he was playing the piano in the dining room, and his father walked up behind him, put his hands upon the boy’s wide shoulders, and said, “Jean-Pierre, you are my oldest son. Someday you will take my place, and you will continue what I have been doing, and you will do it better than I have done it, at least in certain areas. I can count on you, can’t I?” The boy did not answer and simply resumed his playing. But his big shock of stiff hair was at the level of his father’s lips, and his father felt upon his lips through that hair the boy’s love for him and his confidence in himself. They both knew what Madame Barraud and most others did not know, that Jean-Pierre was deeply pious, though he did not go to the temple. Since the age of thirteen he had gone down to the lower village to pray with the old people when his father was away or busy. The old people called him “our friend.” His passions, moving in so many directions, often made him absentminded, so that when people spoke to him during one of his imaginative flights, he turned his eyes upon them with surprise and said, “What?” That “Quoi?” was the typical Jean-Pierre response.

Seeing him dead, Trocmé remembered the feeling he had had at seeing his mother dead by the side of the road when he was nine years old. There was that same contradictory feeling of sheer emptiness filled with pain, nothingness overwhelming in the fullness of its power. He and the rest of the Trocmés had rationalized the death of his mother. In 1914, his father used to say, “Fortunately, your German mother is dead. She would not have been able to bear being rent in two by our two countries and our two families in this terrible war.” But there was no way to understand, to rationalize the death of Jean-Pierre. And not even his faith in

God could reconcile André Trocmé to that death. Soon after his son’s death, he marched into the nearby woods in his drivin pain-filled way, in the hope that God would give him a vision that would make that death something other than a horror to his Pounding through the woods, he screamed at the top of his voice “Jean-Pierre! Jean-Pierre!” Maybe the boy would answer from Heaven. But there was utter silence, except for the blankly meaningless signs of an indifferent nature. And inside him there was only the paradoxical feeling of horror-surrounded solitude, pain-filled nothingness.

In the notes he wrote in his sixties, he says that he suddenly understood that human life is thrown into a world dominated by absurd and chaotic accidents instead of a world providentia ordered by a loving God. In his notes he wrote: “I had, without knowing it, joined Sartre and Camus, who were unknown at the time.” Sartre’s idea that each person is to himself a dark, useless hole in a full, pointless world, and Camus’s idea that all our judgments and all our valor come and go because of absurd circumstance and not because of any rationality or love in the universe, was at the center of Trocmé’s grieving and surprised mind.

Never before, except perhaps at the age of ten when his mother died, had he fully realized how precious the life of another person is; but never again would he believe that God protects that precious life. Never again could he pray to a Protector-God. From now on, God and Jesus were to him powerless, suffering, limited. God was still the Father, but He was as powerless as Trocmé’s father was. God could only join us in our grief, not save us from it.

There is an image in Trocmé’s autobiographical notes that perhaps, derived from that horrific walk in the woods when he screamed for help and received none. More than thirty years after the event, he wrote:

Even today I carry a death within myself, the death of my son, and I am like a decapitated pine. Pine trees do not regenerate their
Consequences—1943–1944

The Astonishing Weeks

Children who have replaced Daniel Trocmé’s refugees at the House of the Rocks.

After writing down this story, Trocmé wrote: “Then I understood that she was coming back to health faster than I was. She had not lost her awareness of the external world. I had.” And he went on: “She was more valiant than I was in the moment of greatest grief.” Her responses were, as always, concerned with the well-being of human beings. She cried, but her husband could not. She responded simply to people; her husband responded also to his own wild soul and to his God. The morning after the interment, she took the ribbons off the flowers so that the children, who were alive and in need, could enjoy them. With all his religious faith—changed, but remaining—all he could do was suffer and find the same suffering in his God.

Magda Trocmé was still Magda Grilli, the same person André Trocmé had met in New York, a person who covered and uncovered the needful bodies of people. She could suffer as deeply as her husband, but always her suffering swiftly issued in humane action. This is what Trocmé meant when he described her as “more valiant than I was.”

For years after the war when she lectured in America and Europe about those years in Le Chambon in order to explain nonviolence and to raise much-needed money for the Cévenol School, she brought with her a pair of trousers that had been worn by Jean-Pierre during the war years. In the course of the lecture she would show her audience those trousers with their patches of different colors and different materials in order to make vivid the poverty of the village and the school during those years. A few years after the death of André Trocmé in 1971, she decided to destroy those trousers because she felt that she would soon die, and she did not want the trousers to be handled by somebody who did not understand what they meant.

But when she told me this story, I was shocked; how could she carry the garment of her dead child into lecture rooms and hold it up and speak about it? I never asked her this question, and I
never shall. When I came to know her better, the answer became
plain. She is a doer as much as she is a feeling person. I did not
have to ask her if every time she touched that garment she suf-
f ered. Her nature is as passionate as her husband’s was, and she
loved that boy who had tried to get away from her to prevent the
Gestapo agent from beating the Jewish refugee child with his own
phytactices; she cherished that son who had been the first to give
a gift of precious chocolate to Monsieur Steklar as he sat arrested
in the Vichy bus. But she is also somebody who is “always ready,
always ready to help.”

The death of Jean-Pierre expunged whatever religious feeling
she may have come to have over the years. During the “awaken-
ing” at Sin-le-Noble that saved Célisse temporarily, her criticisms
of Christianity had softened considerably, and ever since had
been friendly criticisms. But now she turned her back on all
religion, and on her husband as pastor, so that their marriage for
a while was very painful, and later her criticisms of religion went
back to their old severity. But their personal and physical love for
each other kept the marriage thriving, and their shared eagerness
to diminish suffering and killing in the world gave that marriage
meaning for them both.

5-

On the day of Jean-Pierre’s burial, August 15, 1944, the BBC
announced the landing of the Allies in the south of France. From
then on, the Germans were caught between two great military
forces—the triumphant Allies in the north and the equally ag-
gressive troops in the south. The battle for France was in its last
weeks. But for the most part, the Germans kept their discipline
in their retreat from southern France. One hundred and twenty
of them were seized on the northerly road to Saint-Étienne; the
Maquis, too, were well organized. But in the streets of Saint-
Étienne, German prisoners were attacked, and two of them were
lynched; in the neighboring department of the Ardèche, accord-
ing to Trocmé, forty-five German prisoners were found in a war
massacred.

But in Le Chambon, Trocmé did much to keep such massac
from happening. The one hundred and twenty German prison-
of the Maquis were put in the artificial castle on the Lignon cal
the Castle of Mars. Among them was their chief, Major Schme-
ing. Trocmé (partly to set an example for the region) went to
castle to preach to them, and Schmeling, though he was a Cat-
lc, did all he could to get his soldiers to go to the Protest
services. And many of the German soldiers went.

Trocmé’s fellow Frenchmen, often members of the Maq
objected to his sermons against war, sermons based upon the
Commandments and upon the belief that Christ had shown
that we must forgive sins instead of killing the sinner. They told
him that nonviolence might be true in theory, but in practice, v
people like “those guys there in the castle,” only force count-
and they reminded him of the recent German massacres and
the gas chambers in the death camps.

When he gave the identical sermon, in German, to the pris-
ers in the afternoon (he gave his sermons in the temple in
morning), the Germans listened politely and told him after
that their own brave soldiers were ridding Europe of the
Plague, Russian Communism. When he mentioned the massa
and the gas chambers, they raised their shoulders unbelievi-
and said, “Filthy, lying war propaganda.”

Both sides were utterly convinced of their own innocence
of the guilt of their adversaries, which justified any killing
“those guys there.” The end of the war in France (though s
of the Germans still thought that Hitler would save them w
new Blitzkrieg) had made no difference; people were ben
killing each other because of their own innocence and the old
guilt.

The last refugee train to arrive in Le Chambon was the “p

tom train.” Among the various trains of political refugees
Germans were bringing back to Germany, one was sidetracked, taken by the Maquis, and brought to Le Chambon with its fifty amazed and joyous escapees.

In September, General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny’s troops liberated Le Chambon, and Jacques Trocmé remembers all the impressive vehicles and all the black soldiers that passed along the south side of the square, with the people cheering and throwing flowers and kisses at soldiers who seemed only mildly, perfunctorily appreciative of gestures they had been witnessing for weeks.

Soon the refugees left, the children’s houses closed, and so did the funded houses like the Cimade’s Flowery Hill. The school was reduced by half. Even the Maquis left, to join the Army of the Rhine for the final battles with Germany. Le Chambon seemed to have returned to the sad and dying life Trocmé had found when his family first arrived there a decade before.

Both the villagers and the farmers felt a sense of slackening after four years of being drawn along by events, by their leaders, and by their consciences. The heads of boardinghouses, like the Marions, Madame Eyrard, and Madame Barraud, even then began to see that during those four years they had lived more vivaciously than ever before, and they felt lucky to have been able to do something of use. But their feelings were not only directed at the past. They felt “relief and also joy,” as the Ernest Chazot put it, now that those last months were over. And the little Alsation, Madame Barraud, says that they trusted themselves and each other more than ever.

Trocmé, at forty-three years of age, felt tired, “like a fighter,” as he puts it in his notes, “exhausted by the battle.” He felt that he had lived through the harshest and most useful years of his life. But his spirits rose when he thought of the people of Le Chambon, especially during those last few months. He thought of their common sense, their humor, and above all their courage in disobeying desperate enemies who felt now that they had nothing to lose by more killing.

But now those years were past, and Trocmé had to build a new life, just as Le Chambon had to build a new life. It was fall, and the village seemed brown and gray and empty, with two-thirds of its houses shuttered, and those who were left were beginning to settle into the old habits of hibernating, of looking forward drearily to the summer season when the tourists would awaken them to three months of frantic moneymaking after nine months of deadly winter.

What lay ahead for Trocmé and the village was the rejuvenation of the Cévenol School, by way of a trip Trocmé would take to America, where he would find friends for the school, people who would give money to it and work for it. The village would come alive again, all year round, unlike her quiet companion of The Mountain, Le Mazet.

6.

But they would never be the same, and the one who had changed the most was André Trocmé. The people who remained close to him during the war years did not see any sharp change in him, but those who had been away from Le Chambon for a long while saw it. They had always known a strong-willed man, with powerful passions and the courage to displease the smug and the powerful. But now they found a man who had become weightier, more authoritarian than ever, more accustomed to being obeyed. He had developed a commanding manner that had been not only appropriate during the war, but necessary, especially in moments of crisis like the raid of the Vichy buses or during an argument between the Maquis and the villagers or peasants. He had grown accustomed to going for months on end without convening his presbyterial council for advice, and the word I occurred more and more often in his sermons. The man who could work intimately with the people of Maubeuge and Sin-le-Noble and Le Chambon so as to have deep, one-to-one relationships with the members of
his parish had become accustomed to power and had lost much of his capacity to do things with the humblest members of his parish. As one Chambonnais put it, “He led the parish with a rod.”

And this change was involved with another change in him: he had become interested in issues larger than the spiritual leadership of a country parish. More and more, he was thinking about nonviolence on an international scale, and after the war, especially after the Cévenol School was launched again, he lectured frequently for the Fellowship of Reconciliation across the face of Europe and in America. The conversations he had had with his responsables, those who had helped him guide the parish into nonviolent action through Bible discussions, had accustomed him to conversations at a level of intellectualism higher than that of the average Chambonnais. One man who returned to Le Chambon after the war was amazed to see how far beyond both the interests and the capacity of the Chambonnais his talks could be.

Burns Chalmers, who had helped him make the decision to make Le Chambon a village of refuge, had seen him even at the beginning of the Occupation as a “major figure,” as somebody with too much imagination and too much compassion to become a bureaucrat or a servant of bureaucrats. He had seen him as a man capable of taking large steps through the “great openings” that the Quaker George Fox had seen for those who would work for love. Chalmers had been right—both with regard to the Trocmé of the Occupation and with regard to the Trocmé after it. By the time the Occupation had ended, Trocmé had become a weightier man than a little mountain parish could bear, and in a few years he left Le Chambon to become the European secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the world’s most effective organization dedicated to international nonviolence. Still later, he became pastor of Saint-Gervais, one of the oldest parishes in Geneva, that most international of Western cities. He held this post until his retirement. He died in 1971, a year after he retired from the ministry.

André Trocmé was too energetic, too surprisingly creative to be categorized neatly. But there was one description of himself that even he accepted, which was that of un violent vaincu par Dieu (a violent man conquered by God). Those who knew him best, including Édouard Theis, who is a profoundly nonviolent man, accepted this as the most apt description of him. There was a tension in him between anger and love that took different forms in different parts of his life. In his childhood it took the form of anguish at his mother’s death; in his youth it took the form of the union at Saint-Quentin and of his tense admiration for Kindler, the German soldier who taught him nonviolence. In his early parishes it took the form of a passionate mysticism controlled by Magda Grilli Trocmé’s compassionate common sense, and issuing in the “awakening” of Sainte-Catherine and the fragile redemption of Céline. The form it took in Le Chambon is to be seen in a certain passage he wrote in his notes about the summer of 1939, when Hitler was approaching the peak of his audacity and power. Trocmé had just described Nazism as a way of unleashing the “diabolical” forces in mankind by using violence and lies. Then he wrote about his thoughts at that time:

... should I not make use of my knowledge of German to slip into Hitler’s entourage and assassinate him before it is too late, before he plunges the world into a catastrophe without limits? It is because I feared separating myself from Jesus Christ, who refused to use arms to prevent the crime that was being prepared for him, and because of a kind of stubborn perseverance in the growing darkness that I stayed in place; it was also because my ministry in Le Chambon was becoming more and more interesting.

Only his complex love for Jesus, for commitment itself, and for the fresh, the “interesting,” could overcome this anger in him against Hitler, who was doing such harm to God’s precious human lives.

Those words—like the rest of his notes and all of his life—reveal a man of such intensity of awareness that he seemed to be
a microcosm of all humanity, seemed to contain within the limits of his own skin both the world's destructive forces and the world's creative forces. He realized, or, to use Camus's word, he comprehended that struggle because he reenacted the struggle within his own mind.

He once described Cérisse as "nature tamed, a sort of hurricane made useful for turning mills." The image applies to Trocmé himself. His love for human life, a love deepened by his love for the words and deeds of Jesus, was so stubborn that it tamed his immense capacity for anger and made his energies "useful for turning mills."

But even if these images are misleading or wrong, one point is clear: he was not one of those vapid "good people" whom antimalists over the centuries have despised. Whatever moral power he had was in total opposition to pusillanimous conformity. He believed that "decent" people who stay inactive out of cowardice or indifference when around them human beings are being humiliated and destroyed are the most dangerous people in the world. His nonviolence was not passive or saccharine, but an almost brutal force for awakening human beings. He earned the description that the national leadership of his church had made of him: "that dangerous, difficult Trocmé."

In the last pages of his autobiographical notes, Trocmé wrote: "A curse on him who begins in gentleness. He shall finish in insipidity and cowardice, and shall never set foot in the great liberating current of Christianity." Kindness, in order to be valuable, had to be achieved through a struggle with the forces for humiliation and death that are part of mankind. The modern antimalist Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote: "You must have chaos in you to give birth to a dancing star." The chaos of aggression and love in André Trocmé helped give birth to the dancing star named Le Chambon.