

MARTIAL RAYSSE

◆ how the path is long ◆

SECOND EDITION

kamel mennour

MARTIAL RAYSSE

◆ how the path is long ◆

second edition

kamel mennour “

It is written that I shall say a few words on the subject of Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians...
...Oh! How long it is, the path that leads to my girl!...

Lecture given on the 13th May 1984
at the Centre Georges Pompidou.

It is written... that I shall say a few words on the subject of Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians.

Paul, you will remember, receives spiritual enlightenment on the road to Damascus. A

terrible light throws him from his horse; he hears a voice saying “*Why do you persecute me?*” The implication being, you would be better off loving me. That is what he hastily does. Pythagoras had already observed, 2500 years ago, that man is only ever good insofar he has the capacity to be bad.

Thus Paul is transformed from a resolute adversary

to the status of convert and preaches the word of Jesus – but at Antioch, for in Damascus and Jerusalem the converted Jews are Greek so do not speak Hebrew, and read the Scriptures in the Septuagint translation. In the past, Paul had persecuted them in particular. They do not believe in the sincerity of his conversion and want, in fact, to have him killed.

From Antioch, over the course of many years, he undertakes a long series of missionary journeys to Cyprus and Asia Minor, with some success. He preaches in synagogues, is responsible for a few conversions, but also has to face up to a long line of disappointments. At Icone, he is beaten up and only just escapes being lynched. At Lystria, he is tracked down

and stoned, dragged to the city gates and left for dead. At Thessalonica, he preaches at the synagogue over three Sabbaths: “*The Christ spoken about in the scriptures, who has to suffer and bring back the dead: it is Jesus whom I proclaim to you.*”

Among the Jews who listen to him, some convert, but according to Acts, it is mainly a large

number of Greeks. This arouses a certain amount of jealousy. A group of henchmen is recruited; the inhabitants invade the house of Jason. Paul and Silas take shelter. Jason is dragged to the courts and a lawsuit is taken out against him. “*These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying there is*

another king, one called Jesus.” It was a crafty move to invoke the crime of lese-majesty.

Paul has to flee; Jason is ordered to pay a heavy fine. Paul makes his way to Berea, followed by his enemies. Once again he must escape. From Berea, Paul makes his way to Athens. There he preaches in the synagogue and in the streets the people say: “*He seems to be advocating*

foreign gods". But the epicurean and stoic philosophers want to know more and ask him to come and speak at the Areopagus. In a long speech, he tries hard to please his audience, declaring notably: "*People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of*

worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god." And also: "*So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you*". He is listened to politely until the moment when, thinking he has reached the irrefutable argument of his speech, he speaks of the resurrection of the dead. At these words, there is uproar – some laugh, others

say to him, “*We want to hear you again on this subject.*”

It is a failure – he leaves Athens for Corinth. It is there that Timothy, his young disciple, comes to join him from Thessalonica bearing bad news: the community is racked with discord.

Since Paul is forbidden from travelling to

Thessalonica, all he can do is to write – and so we have the first epistle to the Thessalonians. It is the oldest of all Christian texts. We know it from 4th and 5th-century copies, in good condition and without any notable differences, so that the text we have is very close to the original.

From Paul, Silas and Timothy to

the Church of the Thessalonians – his letter is presented as addressing the whole community, but in fact the end tells us for whom it is really intended. It is the Proistamenos – those who govern the community, the chiefs, the leaders – for Paul writes to them, “*I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.*” It is a game of political pass-the-parcel,

for the aim of this letter is to help and exhort the leaders, the Proistamenos, to “*warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.*” Thus we are made to think about the true circumstances under which the Church of the Thessalonians struggled.

Consequently, in the main part of his letter, Paul sets out

to gain the sympathy of the Thessalonians by appealing to their fond memories of him: *“Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. [...] Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone.”*

Through these emotional means, Paul reasserts

his position as leader and the importance of his authority; as an apostle of Christ, he is therefore able to exhort the Thessalonians to function in a way that is worthy of God.

Monsieur Clévenot, to whom, among others, I owe a great deal for the understanding of this text, points out that everything in this letter centres on the Greek term *pistis*, which indeed is mentioned twelve

times. *Pistis* is translated by “faith”. But in reality, it is a pun.

“*Fides est mihi apud aliquem*” does not mean “*I have faith in someone*”, but rather “*someone gives me credit*”. For in the antique world, social relationships rely on faith between members of the same family; but there are also, of course, customers and the

manager. Benveniste states in his dictionary: “*He who holds a man’s fides has this man at his mercy; it is an authority that is exercised as well as being a protection for the one who, in exchange, submits to it, to the extent of his submission.*”

Thus Paul’s first epistle to the Thessalonians reinvigorated the contract

of faith between them and God, in whose name Paul does not hesitate to speak: “*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you.*” This rhetoric legitimises the equivalence between the word of God and that of the apostle, so that the latter attains the status of a sacred text to which ones owes respect and submission – and this

is of benefit to the Proistamenos.

A dogmatic reinforcement of the mythical “foundation”, Paul’s first epistle to the Thessalonians thus functions as a veritable delegation of power. Furthermore, we do not have to wait long for the leaders to be appointed bishops.

The spirit vivifies, the letter kills.

Paul, holy Paul... I am speaking now of Paul Cézanne. It is not on the road to Damascus that he finds enlightenment, but rather in Père Tanguy's shop – it is in some ways the “cradle of modern art”. We can picture him, little Père Tanguy, as Saint Joseph, with straw in his shoes, and Cézanne with his creed of turning impressionism

into a solid art like that found in museums. His method of reaching his goal is to react as Poussin did to nature by treating everything in terms of the cylinder and the sphere.

Here I must point something out that is not insignificant. To consider Poussin through the lens of geometry is a complete misinterpretation.

One of Poussin's aspirations was to give painting the weightiness characteristic of sculpture. It is a question of density and depth, not of form. With Poussin, volume comes from shadow. One only has to look at his drawings. It explains the great trouble he goes to in order to create a composition with these tiny figures. But for the two bishops, Pablo

and Georges, cubes and cylinders are a godsend. Picasso said of Cézanne: "*He is our beloved Mother.*"

Now, if you do not mind, let us shift our thoughts to a few months ago in time, and in space you find yourself with me in my kitchen in the midst of washing up my bowl. Washing up my bowl, sweeping

my doorstep – this is my daily routine, as well as listening to the news on the radio; all of a sudden, the President of the Salon des indépendants is speaking. He says, “*We have done something extraordinary this year,*” and adds, “*but there is a very curious thing: if we take one away,*

we can no longer understand anything.”

Obviously I understand him, the dear chap. The liberties taken by some allow others to take more, so if one is removed, the whole lot falls to pieces. And now, I ask, what happens if we pull the rug out from under Cézanne?

In truth, painting has nothing to do

with lists of rational forms, but rather bears witness to the soul, for the soul.

Painting, great painting, psychological calculation expressed in imaged language, does not rely on the unspoken – on the contrary it speaks, speaks always of knowledge and universal love. The Romans use the term *artifex*:

the user of artifice, the “artist” (and therefore the rest of us poor artists) – and art, considered as a distraction, does not lack charm and, furthermore, is supported by the largest number of enthusiasts.

But the great labour of art also exists – the Greeks would describe it as *daedalian*.

Daedalus is the creator par excellence. *Daedalian* describes the arrangement of significations, an arrangement in and through which he who is guided by Ariadne's thread – the combative love of truth – finds his way out to the light, the accomplishment of the ethical sense of life. The other wanders in what remains a labyrinth. For have no doubt, to say of the Monna Lisa that it is

a young girl with an enigmatic smile, or of Dürer's *Melencolia* that it represents a sad young man surrounded by symbols, is to be inside the labyrinth. Cleanness of vision, yes, and more, and always, for to be modern is above all to see more clearly. The modern painter and modern painting are on their way.

I hear you ask "so,

what should we do?" Well... what we used to be told when we were little: grow up wise and then, for those who are interested, draw – not the drawing of silhouettes or contours that allows a lot of ambiguity, but drawing through shadow and light. How marvellous, to separate light from dark...

Oh! How long it is, the path that leads to my girl!....

© 2012 Martial Raysse.

© 2012 kamel mennour, Paris.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any means, in any media, electronic or mechanical, without prior permission in writing from kamel mennour gallery.

The first edition of this text was published in 1992 by the Éditions Jannink in their collection “L’art en écrit.”

In order to protect the environment, this book was printed in vegetable ink on Munken Print White 150 g, FSC certified, composed of wood fibers from responsible forest management, and on Graphic Board manufactured 100% from recycled wastepaper, FSC certified paper also.

Publishing

kamel mennour “

47, rue saint-andré des arts
paris 75006 france
+33 1 56 24 03 63
galerie@kamelmennour.com
kamelmennour.com

General coordination

Marie-Sophie Eiché

Publishing coordination

Emma-Charlotte Gobry-Laurencin

Graphic design

Éloïse de Guglielmo & Amélie du Petit Thouars
MOSHI MOSHI Studio

Translations & Rereading

James Curwen & Michel Pencreac’h

Printing production

Seven7 – Liège
info@seven7.be

Printing

SNEL – Liège
www.snel.be

Distribution

les presses du réel

www.lespressesdureel.com

ISBN : 978-2-914171-48-9
8 €

