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EMMANUEL MOUNIER'S IDEOLOGICAL ANTI-AMERICANISM

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Was Emmanuel Mounier a man of the Left or the Right? Was he a collaborator or a resistant? Was his Catholicism reactionary or revolutionary? These questions have been the source of a surprisingly lively debate among French historians in the past generation. To them, I add another – was Mounier's vocal anti-Americanism an outgrowth of his progressive marxisant politics, or was it, rather, an element of his pre-war ideology? In this paper I explore Mounier's consistent obsession with America, and propose that cultural anti-Americanism was at the heart of his thought, and that his hatred and suspicion of American civilization forms a sort of link between Mounier the Marxist-Personalist, Mounier the man of Vichy, and Mounier the dissident Catholic antidemocrat. Anti-Americanism can thus be viewed as the single consistent element in the intellectual and spiritual voyage of these many different "mouniers."

When he died, nearly sixty years ago, it seemed certain that the Mounier would be remembered as the champion of Leftist Personalism, the reconciler of Christ, Marx and Nietzsche, and, later, the spiritual father of "Liberation Theology," in short, a sort of Catholic Jean-Paul Sartre. He had taken the journal he founded, *Esprit*, from a marginal following during the 1930s, to international prominence. *Esprit*, like its founder, had undergone significant shifts from an eclectic spiritual "non-conformism" vaguely affiliated with (although alienated from) the political Right, to a thorough political engagement on the marxisant Left. In between, Mounier also had a controversial sojourn with Vichy at "Uriage." But it is the postwar Emmanuel Mounier who had the greatest influence.

It seemed natural that this Mounier would view the United States as the greatest threat to civilization-conspiring, as he saw it, against all that was independent, human, and authentic. For Mounier's many followers, this anti-Americanism seemed the logical product of an outraged soul, and it blended nicely into the Americanophobic circles of the postwar Left Bank. Mounier's anti-American Personalism afforded Christians the opportunity to be as uncompromisingly radical as Communists.

Those who knew Mounier better might have noticed two serious discrepancies. First, that his anti-Americanism, now opportunistically left-wing, had been a part of his thought since the early days of *Esprit*, and, second, that there was something inauthentic about this newly politicized Mounier. Politics, after all, had been the enemy in the 1930s, when the victory over the "established disorder" would have to be exclusively spiritual.

My paper argues two, related points. First, that his anti-Americanism was not a product of political circumstance but was rather always a crucial part of his *Weltanschauung*. Second, that Mounier's postwar anti-American vehemence was partially "bad faith," that is, that Mounier's initial lack of resistance against Nazi Germany led him to "resist" the United States with tremendous vigor. With a Nazi-dominated Europe Mounier had, once, considered compromise, but with an American-dominated Europe the only answer would be struggle.

In my paper I return Mounier back to his 1930s non-conformist milieu, where we find him trying to take the Catholic revival out of the hands of reactionaries and to "remake the Renaissance." Yet we also find that, like Robert Brasillach, Robert Aron, Thierry Maulnier, and others, Mounier was part of a community which viewed America as an eternal enemy. This was not, strictly-speaking, a political position, since it was American culture that represented the true threat to France, Europe, and the future of humanity. And, like so many in that generation, when the terrifyingly tangible danger

emerged from Germany, not the United States, Emmanuel Mounier was neither intellectually equipped, nor personally disposed, to resist it.