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► To cite this version:

| Yves Balmer. Religious Literature in Messiaen's Personal Library. 2008. hal-00308863

HAL Id: hal-00308863

<https://hal.science/hal-00308863>

Preprint submitted on 3 Aug 2008

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Religious Literature in Messiaen's Personal Library

Yves Balmer¹

"Personal libraries allow us to materialize in the most visible manner the interface between the act of creation and the social space in which that act is immersed."²

The eclecticism and the sheer number of references cited in Messiaen's *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie* combined with third party reports of the composer's monumental literary knowledge³ give clear proof that Messiaen was familiar with a vast and varied number of texts. Still, to date, there have been few studies of Messiaen's private library and preferred reading materials,⁴ despite existing research which has revealed the heuristic potential of such investigations.⁵ The present study elaborates upon the concept of

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² Paulo D'Iorio and Daniel Ferrer, *Bibliothèques d'écrivains* (Paris : CNRS Editions, 2001), p. 7.

³ For example : P. Mari : « And then there is reading, that vice [which in Messiaen] is never quenched. » in Pierrette Mari, *Olivier Messiaen* (Paris : Seghers, 1965) p. 10, as well as multiple reports from the students of Messiaen in the work of Boivin.

⁴ See Gareth Healey, 'Messiaen the Bibliophile', in Christopher Dingle and Nigel Simeone (ed.), *Messiaen : Music, Art and Literature* (Aldershot : Ashgate, 2007), pp. 159-172, as well as Andrew Shenton's article listing works on rhythm read by Messiaen : Andrew Shenton, 'Observations on time in Olivier Messiaen's *Traité*', in Christopher Dingle and Nigel Simeone (ed.), *Messiaen : Music, Art and Literature* (Aldershot : Ashgate, 2007), pp. 173-190.

⁵ Cf. Roger Chartier, *Ecouter les morts avec les yeux* (Paris : Collège de France / Fayard, 2008). See also the volume to be published in 2008 *Les Bibliothèques d'artistes* (Paris : INHA), actes du colloque « Les bibliothèques d'artistes 20^e – 21^e siècles », held March 9-12, 2006 at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (Paris). [<http://inha.fr/IMG/pdf/partenaire-prog9mars.pdf> consulted July 25, 2008.]

Messiaen as a reader. We do not intend to discover how specific texts may have influenced the composer personally or musically, but rather we seek to sketch a portrait of the composer through the medium of the texts he read.

There is currently no formal catalogue of Messiaen's personal library.⁶ The present study draws from a body of some 600 references to works or authors contained in the seven volumes of Messiaen's theoretical magnum opus, the *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie* with the intention of reconstructing not *definitive* version of Messiaen's library, but rather, an impression of that collection's essence⁷. While there are certainly gaps and foggy areas in this portrait, our study is nevertheless based upon a set of works read by the composer and judged by him to be of interest and worthy of citation in his own writings. Beyond the coherence lent to this corpus by the identity of its reader, it was an interest in possible links between these references that motivated our study. Our hope is to broaden our knowledge of the composer through the medium of his readings, presented in his writings as the sources of his art. A personal library, and more particularly, a group of books known to have been read by their owner, reveals something about the owner's taste and choices. It

⁶ A few books from his library have been donated to the Fonds Loriod-Messiaen of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, see Yves Balmer, *Catalogue des concerts du fonds Loriod-Messiaen de la Bibliothèque nationale de France*, 2008, p. 7-9.

⁷ One must take into account the problematic aspect of the texts that form the *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie* given the fact that Messiaen had not finished the text before his death, and that the texts brought together were written at different periods throughout his life. As Alain Louvier explains in his « Avant-Propos », « With all of the respect and fidelity that one senses Yvonne Loriod has put in order this *Traité* written between 1948 and 1992, respecting rigorously the outline in seven volumes indicated by Messiaen in 1991. Grouping together chapters written at different points in the composer's life, she remained faithful to the presentation in the manuscript (paragraphs, subparagraphs, underlined words, etc ...) », see Alain Louvier, 'Avant-Propos', in Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie : tome 1*, Paris : Leduc, 1994, p. VIII.

contains traces of his intellect. These traces have implications on both the personal and social levels.

Perhaps because Messiaen came from a family of intellectuals,⁸ he gave references for most of the citations in the *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie*. These references constitute a clear collection of readings while also hinting the composer's sense of their usefulness. The first chapter of volume one, "*Le Temps*," for example, is based primarily on the juxtaposition of citations pulled from a variety of texts. This array of references reveals Messiaen as a reader who compiles. The sum of a heterogeneous set of citations creates a singular new whole, reminiscent of the eclectic construction of Messiaen's musical language.⁹

It is possible to define several coherent groups within the whole of Messiaen's citations. The majority of references are the names of composers. Messiaen also refers to the names of a number of painters. There is greater difficulty as far as written texts are concerned, coming as they do from a variety of disciplines including literature, poetry, musicology, ornithology and philosophy. This article reports two key points gleaned from the *Traité*'s textual references. First, Messiaen's literary references contain a clear set of readings rooted in the Catholic Literary Renaissance. Second, Messiaen's frequent citation of the collective work *Les Rythmes et la vie*, provides an opportunity to understand his discovery of seemingly secular authors via the Catholic milieu.

Olivier Messiaen, a reader marked by the Catholic Renaissance

⁸ Pierre Messiaen, a lycée teacher, also taught for many years at the Institut Catholique de Paris (I. C. P.). For more biographical information see Yves Balmer, '*Je suis né croyant... Aux sources du catholicisme de Messiaen*', in Sylvain Caron and Michel Duchesneau (ed), *Musique, art et religion dans l'entre deux-guerres*, (Lyon : Symétrie, 2008).

⁹ See for example Pierre Boulez, '*Vision et révolution*', in *Regards sur autrui : Points de repère, tome II* (Paris : Bourgois, 2005), pp. 436-443.

In late 19th century France there developed a movement which came to be known as the Christian Intellectual Renaissance. This movement encompassed “all of the debates, essays, novels and poetry up until the early 1930s written by authors identifying themselves as Catholic and intended as specifically literary and more generally intellectual.”¹⁰ The Christian Intellectual Renaissance found a more explicitly literary expression with the advent of the Catholic Literary Renaissance, founded by a group of writers determined to “forge a Catholic esthetic which, in their spirits, would serve as spearhead for the religious reconquest of the “eldest daughter of the Church” whose straying into “secularism” had culminated with the 1905 French law on the separation of Church and State.”¹¹ Most of the movement’s writers were converts to Catholicism¹² and included Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy, Georges Bernanos, and François Mauriac.¹³

Messiaen shared with these writers a rejection of Enlightenment ideals, asserting his distaste for Jean-Jacques Rousseau,¹⁴ much like Ernest Hello, one of the movement’s

¹⁰ Hervé Serry, ‘Le double jugement de l’art est-il possible ? Les impasses d’une critique catholique dans trois polémiques littéraires et religieuses de l’entre-deux-guerres’, *La Société d’études soréliennes : Mil neuf cent*, 26/1 (2008) : 73-90.

¹¹ Hervé Serry, *Naissance de l’intellectuel catholique* (Paris : La découverte, 2004), p. 7.

¹² See Adrien Dansette, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine : l’Église catholique dans la mêlée politique et sociale* (Paris : Flammarion, 1965), pp. 698-704. See also Frédéric Gugelot, *La conversion des intellectuels au catholicisme en France 1885-1935*, (Paris : CNRS Editions, 1998).

¹³ For more on this issue we suggest the recent work of Hervé Serry, particularly « Déclin social et revendication identitaire : la “renaissance littéraire catholique” de la première moitié du XX^e siècle », *Sociétés Contemporaines* 44 (2002) : 91-109, and Hervé Serry, *Naissance de l’intellectuel catholique*. See also Stephen Schloesser’s, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Claude Samuel, *Entretiens avec Olivier Messiaen* (Paris : Belfond, 1967), p. 181. This opinion of Rousseau disappeared from the definitive version of the interviews published in 1999. In this sense, Messiaen holds

precursors. The “condamnation of the infernal foursome of Voltaire, Rousseau, Hegel, and Renan.”¹⁵ was a major theme throughout Hello’s work.

Messiaen’s literary references in the *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d’ornithologie* include writers who were precursors to the Christian Intellectual Renaissance, writers solidly positioned within the movement itself, and philosophers who followed in its foot steps.

Among the 19th century authors who prefigured the Catholic Renaissance and embodied its spiritualist essence stands Ernest Hello¹⁶ who is also known for his influence on Messiaen’s *Visions de l’Amen*. Hello (1828-1885) represents a model Catholic writer, whose “influence on the mystical literature of the 19th and 20th centuries is as pregnant as it is discreet. Bernanos claims to owe “everything” to him, Claudel praises his ‘dazzling strokes of lightening,’ and Gide makes reference to him. Echoes of Hello’s writing can also be heard in the work of [Julien] Green and Dominique De Roux [...]”¹⁷ Hello’s place as a precursor to the Christian intellectual movements also stems from his determining influence on Léon Bloy while Hello was still alive.¹⁸ Bloy was Jacques Maritain’s Godfather, Maritain became one of the key figures in the Christian Intellectual Renaissance.¹⁹

similar views to his father who denounced on several occasions « the values of 1789 », see for example Pierre Messiaen, ‘Péguy poète national et chrétien’, *La revue des Amis de Saint-François*, 29 (1941) : 19-24.

¹⁵ François Angelier, ‘Hello, l’explosion de l’unité’, in Ernest Hello, *Paroles de Dieu. Réflexions sur quelques textes sacrés* (Grenoble : Million, 1992), p. 18.

¹⁶ Cited in Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d’ornithologie : tome 3* (Paris : Leduc, 1996) and Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d’ornithologie : tome 5* (Paris : Leduc, 1999).

¹⁷ François Angelier, ‘Hello, l’explosion de l’unité’, in Ernest Hello, *Paroles de Dieu. Réflexions sur quelques textes sacrés* (Grenoble : Million, 1992), p. 18.

¹⁸ Also found in a biography of Hello : Patrick Kechichian, *Les usages de l’éternité : Essai sur Ernest Hello* (Paris : Seuil, 1993), p. 95, as well as a work by Bloy dedicated to Hello : Léon Bloy, *Ici on assassine les grands hommes : par Léon Bloy : avec un portrait et un autographe d’Ernest Hello* (Paris : Mercure de France, 1895).

Another precursor quoted by Messiaen is Maurice de Guérin, a poet of Christian and spiritualist sensibilities.²⁰ Messiaen cites a long passage from Guérin's poem *Centaure* to clarify the effect of the "gradual slowing of durations" in the tâla n° 88, Laksmîça: "*Couché sur le seuil de ma retraite, les flancs cachés dans l'ancre et la tête sous le ciel, je suivais le spectacle des ombres. Alors la vie étrangère qui m'avait pénétré durant le jour se détachait de moi goutte à goutte, retournant au sein paisible de Cybèle, comme après l'ondée les débris de la pluie attachée aux feuillages font leur chute et rejoignent les eaux.*"²¹ A Christian figure who considered that "Man's heart is the place of union between the sky and the earth, the meeting point of God and the animal within humanity,"²² Maurice de Guérin was a poet in close touch with nature with whom Messiaen could have identified.²³ François Mauriac, one

See also Claude Barthe's preface to Ernest Hello, *L'Homme : la vie, la science, l'art* (Paris : Editions de Paris, 2003), pp. 9-20

¹⁹ For the sake of preserving the traces of social networks we should also cite that Hello's posterity depends upon the publication of his « Textes choisis » in 1945 by Stanislas Fumet, publisher and friend of Pierre Messiaen.

²⁰ Cited in Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie : tome 1*, p. 329.

²¹ Ibid., p. 329.

²² Citation of Guérin by G. S. Trebutien, in Maurice de Guérin, *Maurice de Guérin : journal, lettre et poèmes* (Paris : Lecoivre, 1898), p. VI.

²³ « The sounds of nature, [Maurice de Guérin] tells us : "I will always listen to them. When one sees me dreaming, its because I am thinking of their harmonies." Maurice "listens" ; he "considers the horizon" ; he stays "for hours on end" without moving, waiting, under the protection of "a certain place", of a certain "tree", from which, like cluster of wisteria flowers, his entire being is suspended. Entirely passive and entirely active : "the sounds of nature", slowly and gradually, transform themselves inside of him, transmitting the refrain of their cadences, weaving a supple and melodious garland : "oh ! how lovely they are, these natural sounds, the sounds that spread through the air, that rise with the sun and follow it, following the sun like a grand concert follows a king" – [...] », cited from Charles Du Bos, 'Le Génie de Maurice de Guérin', in Maurice de Guérin, *Le Centaure. La Bacchante : précédés de La génie de Maurice Guérin, par Charles du Bos* (Paris : Falaize, 1950), pp. 17-18.

of the major figures of the Catholic Literary Renaissance, later wrote a preface for an edition of Guérin whom he considered as a reference for the movement. Mauriac described Guérin's poems as "the most beautiful of our literature."²⁴

Other authors cited by Messiaen in his *Traité* including Claudel, Baumann, and Reverdy, were directly involved in the Catholic Literary Renaissance. These three writers all published in Plon's collection *Roseau d'or* directed by Jacques Maritain and Stanislas Fumet.²⁵ Claudel²⁶ characterized the Catholic Literary Renaissance as "one of the most interesting literary revolutions to take place in our country. For centuries all of our poets' efforts have gone towards the creation of a fictitious land where the Gospel never sets foot, a place ignorant of Christ's Revolution and moral code and reigned over by the gods of paganism."²⁷

Messiaen also refers to Pierre Reverdy,²⁸ one of his favorite poets, who belonged to the Catholic Literary Renaissance as well. In reality, Reverdy was more "thirsty for the absolute" than a true Catholic or mystic, but he converted to the Catholic faith for a period of time, and lived near the Benedictine Abbey of Solesmes from 1926 onwards. In 1927 Reverdy published *Le Gant de crin* in the *Roseau d'or* collection. Many of his other poems were also featured in the collection's collective volumes.

²⁴ François Mauriac, 'Préface' à Maurice de Guérin, *Le Centaure. La Bacchante : précédés de La génie de Maurice Guérin*, par Charles du Bos, p. 11.

²⁵ For more on « Le Roseau d'or », see Philippe Chenaux, *Entre Maurras et Maritain : une génération intellectuelle catholique (1920-1930)* (Paris : Cerf, 1999), pp. 68-78.

²⁶ Claudel is cited by Messiaen in three of the seven volumes : Volumes 1, 4 et 5 of the *Traité*, particularly his *L'annonce faite à Marie* and *Le Repos du septième jour*.

²⁷ Preface by Paul Claudel to Louis Chaigne, *Anthologie de la renaissance catholique* (Paris : Alsatia, 1938).

²⁸ Cited in volumes 1, 5, 6 and 7 of the *Traité*.

Emile Baumann (1868-1941) should also be mentioned here. His *Textes choisis* appeared in the fifth volume of the Catholic Renaissance Anthology at the beginning of the 20th Century.²⁹ Bauman's work is penetrated with a mystical, sorrowful Catholicism in the tradition of Bloy and Huysmans. Messiaen cites his *Nourritures célestes* in the third volume of the *Traité*.

There remains a third category of references, those Catholic thinkers and philosophers who were issue of the Catholic Literary Renaissance. First, there is Messiaen's reference to Columba Marmion (1858-1923) and his well-known book *Le Christ dans ses mystères* (1919). In a work that traces the major themes of Marmion's thinking, the Canon Cardolle remarks: "[...] Certainly laymen [...] contributed considerably to the spiritual *élan* between the two World wars, including Bloy, Psichari, Péguy, Légaut, and Thibon. But at the present time, Marmion remains one of the most heeded of our spiritual guides. A survey was made among Belgian Catholics during the [Second World] War which asked, 'Do you read religious books? Which titles and authors?' The name most frequently mentioned was that of Marmion."³⁰ Marmion is a spiritual writer whose works are problematic, lying somewhere between spirituality and theology. They invoke a typically 19th century spirituality marked by devotion to the Sacred Heart, the Eucharist, and the Virgin Mary. They are anchored in the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, along with those of Saint Paul and Saint John and *The Rule* of Saint Benedict.³¹

²⁹ Louis Alphonse Maugendre, *La Renaissance catholique au début du 20^e siècle : Emile Baumann (1868-1941)* (Paris : Beauchesne, 1968).

³⁰ Cardolle, *Aux Jeunes. Et toi, connais-tu le Christ vie de ton âme ? D'après l'œuvre de Dom Marmion* (Paris : Desclée De Brouwer, 1949).

³¹ Mark Tierney, *Dom Columba Marmion : Une biographie* (Paris : Buchet / Chastel, 2000), pp. 307-325.

Messiaen cited other contemporary Catholic philosophers like Jean Guitton, (a disciple of Bergson, who Messiaen also cited), as well as Gustave Thibon. Both were Thomasian philosophers like Marmion, emphasizing the fact that although Messiaen never refers to Jacques Maritain, the most celebrated of Thomasian thinkers, he does cite Saint Thomas directly in volumes 1, 3, and 7.³²

The reconstitution of Messiaen's virtual library using his litany of references to specific authors in his *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie*, throws into relief – in the context of his literary references – a considerable number of texts from the French Catholic Literary circles of the early 20th century. It is logical to assume that the formation of this collection dates to the composer's youth, but we must also take into account the fact that these references define an environment, a particular social sphere and manner of perceiving the world at a given historical moment. They are specifically Catholic and share their references to Saint Thomas Aquinas. These texts are issue from the (admittedly diffuse and polymorphous) dominant paradigm of Catholic Revival in late 19th and early 20th century France. This was a movement which Messiaen's intellectual father (Pierre) and his poet brother (Alain) were both involved. One of Pierre Messiaen's colleagues, Louis Chaigne,³³

³² For more on the influence of Thomasian philosophy over Thibon see Hervé Pasqua, *Bas-fonds et profondeur : Critique de l'idôlatry et métaphysique de l'espérance : Essai sur la philosophie de Gustave Thibon* (Paris : Klincksieck, 1985). Gustave Thibon was a Christian philosopher who contributed to the *Revue thomiste* and *Etudes carmélitaines*. See the contents of *Etudes Carmélitaines* : <http://perso.p-poirot.mageos.com/tabledesvolumes.htm> [online, consulted October 7, 2007]

³³ On the friendship between Chaigne and P. Messiaen see Louis Chaigne, *Itinéraire d'une espérance : Pages de journal* (Paris : Beauchesne, 1970), p. 181.

compiled the first anthology of the Catholic Literary Renaissance,³⁴ and his editor at the publishing house Desclée De Brouwer was none other than Stanislas Fumet himself.³⁵

Les rythmes et la vie, Discovery of a Key Work

In the first volume of his *Traité* Messiaen makes several references to the collective work *Les Rythmes et la Vie*. The fact that this work is not mentioned in the acknowledgements at the end of the volume³⁶ makes it difficult to identify, particularly since two books bear the same title. One was published in Lyon and although undated, would seem to date from 1934.³⁷ The second was printed in Paris in 1947.³⁸ The two books are related to each other – the 1947 version containing fourteen articles is a revised and expanded version of the original, which contains only nine. In the first volume of the *Traité* Messiaen refers

³⁴ Chaigne published an important *Anthologie de la renaissance catholique* in three volumes which introduced the authors of the Catholic literary Renaissance (see Louis Chaigne, *Anthologie de la renaissance catholique*, (Paris : Alsatia, 1938). The first volume (1938) holds a preface by Claudel : (citation in paper)

³⁵ Both men knew each other, as a signed copy from Fumet to P. Messiaen attests : « To Pierre Messiaen, who brings Shakespeare to life. Best wishes. » in Stanislas Fumet, *L'Amour* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 1939) (The author's personal collection). Fumet was also Pierre Messiaen's editor at the publishing house Desclée, and commissioned Pierre Messiaen's translation of Shakespeare, see Stanislas Fumet, *Histoire de Dieu dans ma vie*, (Paris : Editions du Cerf, 2002), p. 396. Alain Messiaen kept company with Fumet, as Fumet's memoirs attest, Stanislas Fumet, *Histoire de Dieu dans ma vie*, p. 691.

³⁶ Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie : tome 1*, p. 369.

³⁷ Groupe lyonnais d'études médicales, philosophiques et biologiques, *Les Rythmes et la vie*, (Lyon : Lavendier, 1933).

³⁸ Laignel-Lavastine, *Les Rythmes et la vie* (Paris : Plon, 1947).

explicitly to *Les Rythmes et la Vie* three times. A comparison of the two versions confirms that all three references are only found in the 1947 edition.³⁹

Messiaen's three explicit references to *Les Rythmes de la Vie* cite the doctor René Biot⁴⁰, the economist Jean Chevalier⁴¹ and the philosopher Gustave Thibon.⁴² Further comparison between the table of contents of *Les Rythmes et la vie* and the index of Messiaen's *Traité* reveals that three other authors cited by Messiaen in his *Traité* contributed to *Les Rythmes et la vie*. They include the philosopher Jean Guitton, the dramatist François Guillot de Rodes, and the physicist Jean Thibaud. Though Messiaen fails to mention it, his citations of Guitton⁴³ and Guillot de Rodes both come from *Les Rythmes et la vie*.

The physicist Jean Thibaud contributed a very long article to *Les Rythmes et la vie* which Messiaen does not cite directly. However, Messiaen does quote Thibaud's book *Vie et transfiguration des atomes*, which happens to be the only source for his aforementioned article. Messiaen probably discovered Thibaud's book via his article in *Les Rythmes et la vie*.

There are thus six references from *Les Rythmes et la vie* in Messiaen's *Traité*, enough to qualify the work as one of the cornerstones of Messiaen's theories on rhythm. These articles include:

³⁹ Thus correcting the identification of this work in the list of works consulted by Messiaen in writing the first chapter on time from the first volume of the *Traité* given by Andrew Shenton in, 'Observations on time in Olivier Messiaen's *Traité*', p. 188 et 189.

⁴⁰ Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie : tome 1*, p. 29.

⁴¹ Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie : tome 1*, p. 29.

⁴² Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie : tome 1*, p. 29.

⁴³ This author is cited in Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie : tome 1*, p. 41, in the context of a list of definitions of time : « Rhythm is an alternation : the passage from the self to the other and from the other to the self. » [without reference] The citation comes from the introduction written by Jean Guitton of the Groupe lyonnais d'études médicales, philosophiques et biologiques, *Les rythmes et la vie* (Lyon : Lavendier, 1934), p. 9.

- Jean Guilton: “Introduction – The Significance of Rhythm”
- Jean Thibaud: “Rhythm in Physical Reality: From Atom to Star”
- René Biot: “Sexual Activity”
- Jean Chevalier: “Rhythm in the World of Economics”
- François Guillot de Rodes: “Rhythm and Dance”
- Gustave Thibon: “The Rhythms of Spiritual Life”

Upon reading the *Traité*, one is struck by the variety of domains Messiaen calls upon in laying out his theories on time. Yet one also notes his dependence upon a single collective work containing articles on rhythm by experts in a number of different fields (philosophy is covered by Guilton, and Thibon, physics by Thibaud, medical science by Biot, economics by Chevalier, theatre, choreography, and dance by Guillot de Rodes). The discovery of this collective work among Messiaen’s readings reveals that seemingly varied references may come from common sources. More importantly, by studying how these articles came to be published in one collective volume, one discovers that *Les Rythmes et la vie* is hardly as secular as its title would suggest. Rather, it falls entirely within the vein of the Catholic Renaissance.

To the reader who takes into consideration the scientific and religious stakes in the France of the 1930s, the 1934 version of *Les Rythmes et la vie* clearly the product of a Catholic milieu and related to the Catholic Renaissance. The book was compiled under the direction of the doctor René Biot, a professor of medicine at the University of Lyons and published under the aegis of the “Groupe lyonnais d’études médicales philosophiques et biologiques.” This Lyons research group was formed to investigate possible links between biology and psychology, and tried to respond to social and moral issues through medical science. Though the group’s name does not betray its Catholic inspiration, all of the issues examined through the lens of medical science contained in this collective volume are issues

dear to Catholic morality. One example is the question posed by the secretary general of the association, René Biot, in his introduction to the volume. He tidily sums up the group's tone, asking: "Can a doctor reflect upon Humanity if he overlooks God?" This scientific publication focused on medical science is typical of the tendency towards scientific mediation during the 1930's. The search for a "new humanism" during these years gave rise to initiatives popularizing scientific advances.⁴⁴ *Les Rythmes* is a scientific publication written for a general audience, with a clearly stated religious background. This is the same strategy adopted by the Christian Intellectual Renaissance, which refused both the anti-rationalism of Rome and the anticlerical rationalism of certain scientists. In a word, the Christian Intellectual Renaissance sought to reconcile the Christian faith with the freedom of personal spirit.

The 1947 version of *Les Rythmes* reprints two thirds of the articles from 1934 and adds eight new articles. Despite this considerable change, the tone of the second volume continues to position itself within the same Catholic mindset. The 1947 publication was directed by a professor of medicine, Laignel-Lavastine, who also participated in the 1934 and whose Catholic faith was described by both his contemporaries and his disciples. The second edition of *Les Rythmes* was printed as part of Plon's collection *Présences*, which also printed many Catholic authors like Gabriel Marcel, Jacques Maritain, and Jean Guitton. The collection was directed by Daniel-Rops who, at the time, was one of France's most prolific, widely read, and highly considered Catholic writers. Daniel-Rops was also an esteemed Catholic critic alongside Maritain and Pierre Emmanuel.

Both versions of *Les rythmes et la vie* were published at the heart of the Catholic movement. They can even be thought of as committed to the Catholic cause. Though the

⁴⁴ See François Chaubet, *Histoire intellectuelle de l'entre deux guerres* (Paris : Nouveau Monde, 2006), p. 36.

general content of their articles does not deal explicitly with religion, (aside from the citations of Guitton and Thibon, who were both Catholic intellectuals), once the origin of these articles is recognized, it is possible to conclude that Messiaen's seemingly secular references (like those to Thibaud, Biot, Chevallier, and Guillot de Rodes) are in fact drawn from a Catholic publication. If they had not been published in a compilation like *Les rythmes et la vie*, it would have been difficult to find a link between them and Catholicism, a link which becomes clear within the context of their common citation by Messiaen. In other words, it is *through* his religious culture, clarified in the first part of this article, that Messiaen discovers his secular references.

The books read by Messiaen and cited in the *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie* make it possible to define our knowledge of Messiaen's intellectual universe. Most of his literary references are related to the Catholic Renaissance, while other works like *Les Rythmes et la vie* are still bathed in a Catholic intellectual milieu, even when they do not explicitly deal with religion. This observation is also pertinent when one considers other works cited by Messiaen like *A la gloire de la terre*, written by the geologist Pierre Termier,⁴⁵ whose bibliography reveals him to be fervent Catholic well versed in the works of Bloy et Maritain.⁴⁶ Messiaen's cultural references are clearly those of a man shaped by the spirit of French Catholic intellectual circles in the 1920s and 30s. The citation of such works in a

⁴⁵ Cited in volumes 1, 2, and 4 of the *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie*.

⁴⁶ « From 1905 to Bloy's death in 1917 the Bloys and the Maritains see each other very frequently, often along with other young men and women. The principal names, besides the Maritains, are Pierre and Christine van der Meer, Georges Auric the composer, Georges Rouault the painter, and Pierre Termier the geologist (who, with Bloy, believed that the Garden of Eden was the lost city of Atlantis). », Deal Wyatt Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini, *Understanding Maritain : Philosopher and friend* (Mercer University Press, 1987), p. 81.

work written after the Second World War reveal this culture is firmly rooted in the composer's character. Certain of Messiaen's esthetic concerns, particularly his interest in rhythm, should be reevaluated in light of this new knowledge. In the preface to the second edition of *Les Rythmes et la vie* signed by the group *Présences* one reads "While one of the essential elements of Man, rhythm is also one of the most mysterious. [...] To all those who have followed our work over the last ten years, we hope to present one of its themes here. [Rhythm is one of the most] fertile subjects for the contemporary man to choose as the subject of his meditation or for a study in and of itself."⁴⁷ It is remarkable to note that a Catholically oriented research group was interested in the notion of rhythm as an object of investigation and meditation. This discovery opens a possible line of inquiry in Messiaen studies: was Messiaen's interest in rhythm a strictly musical preoccupation, or was it possibly also religious?

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⁴⁷ Laignel-Lavastine, *Les Rythmes et la vie* (Paris : Plon, 1947), p. II.