



FRANCE AND GOD

CHAPTER II

How many moral or physical sufferings, a people which rejected God, can it make itself guilty with good intentions?

THE PLAINS OF UKRAINE

February 1981: The discovery

At a time when, for me, God did not exist, it was He who brought me by Grace, this experience of the former Soviet Union, and opened my eyes to the decay of a people in which the churches were prohibited and whose their edifices were used as barns or stables. I considered this use full of common sense for my part, and rejoiced that any worship to God was considered as an attack on public order, but I was very quick to reject the pitiful result.

It was during the winter of 1981. I was going to stay there for the first time from February to the end of May, then to return there for five to six weeks on September. On the day of the election of the President Mitterrand, I was not in France, although I was there with all my heart.

I never went further in my political convictions, than this to remain in the anonymity of the ballot, but I was certainly sustaining at that time, ideas with communist tendencies. I therefore left with some hope of finding a form of consolidation of my opinions, of which I was on the contrary going to be cured, long before my first return. Being then anti-God, it goes without saying that in many areas I was not a saint. However, I will not speak here according to an analysis related to a possible religious puritanism attached to my Christian conversion, but according to my perception of the time, which has not changed at all.

I had been back since only a few months from my stay in Colombia, to which I hinted in the preceding chapter, when my company planned to send me to replace colleagues who were overwhelmed by the difficulties on a putting into service. It involved bringing into production of a large industrial enzyme unit sold by a French group to the USSR a few years earlier. It was located in Ukraine halfway from Kiev and Odessa, on the outskirts of a small town of twenty four thousand inhabitants that is called Ladijin (Ладжин).

The various conversations I had with my colleagues before I left, had prepared me well enough for what I would find in relation to the black market. It seemed to me, however, that this would be the only difference I would discover with France. I especially received from one of them the motivation to bring with me some new jeans, in order to get me some extra pocket money, that's all.

So I flew to Moscow with a happy heart, with a majority of my preconceived ideas about the great Russia and my convictions with communist tendencies. From the whole group of seven or eight French from various companies, who went to the scene, I was the only one to make the trip for the

first time. Moscow and its few vehicles in the streets seemed to me somewhat gloomy, but since it was only a lightning evening of transit between the airport and the train station, I did not linger on that. During our sleep, many stops punctuated the journey of our night train. In the early morning, powered by a languor that seemed to come to it from time immemorial, he progressed listlessly in these immense snow-covered plains. Here and there, kolkhozes¹ located close to isolated hamlets were reminiscent of certain movie memories, such as Anna Karenina² or Doctor Zhivago³.

1. Kolkhoz (Колхоз): Collective farm in the U.S.S.R., which included a state sector (farmlands), a collectivized sector (livestock, means of production, operating buildings) and a non-collectivized sector (houses of peasant families, plots devoted to gardening and small livestock, etc.). The kolkhozes were dismantled in 1992.
2. Anna Karenina, novel by Tolstoy (1876-1877), brilliant evocation of various social backgrounds. Tolstoy opposes the tragic failure of the heroine (who, having sacrificed her household to an adulterous love with the officer Vronsky, throws herself under a train) to the blossoming of Kitty Cherbatski in a united household. MOVIES Films by: Edmund Goulding (1891-1959), in 1927; Clarence Brown (1890, 1987), in 1935, both with Greta Garbo; Julien Duvivier (1949), with Vivien Leigh.
3. Dr. Zhivago, novel by Pasternak (1957): The First World War, the Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war upset the life of a Moscow doctor. The novel, published in Italy, was banned in U.S.S.R. MOVIES Film by David Lean (1965), with Omar Sharif (born in 1932) and Julie Christie (born 1940).

In our group, a couple traveling with a little girl seemed very sad. They already had three years of expatriation on the spot, and were a sorry sight. To create the contact and to get them out of their moroseness, I spoke to the husband, and banally inquired about the way of life on the spot. To my great astonishment, I got from him only a scathing answer that left me speechless, of the style: "I'm tired of being taken for a "stupid jerk" by those I warn, you'll see by yourself".

Although this repartee did not augur anything well to me, I did not pay attention, considering the remoteness as the reason for the blatant weariness and bad humor of this man. It was not so, but at the moment I could not understand it. The latter had long since observed the heresy I was about to discover, and during his previous travels he had tried to translate the whole Soviet slump to the newcomers. He had then been criticized by less informed people than him, so much the image that we could have of this nation was far removed from the daily reality, and the inconsistencies concealed on a large scale.

In Vinnitsa (Вінниця), located two hundred and seventy kilometers southwest of Kiev, we left the train to continue the last hundred and ten kilometers by bus to Ladijin (ладжин). Just as I had found a good pretext for the number of vehicles in Moscow, the excuse of the deplorable state of the roads came this time from the climate. We were no longer in a region of Siberian cold, but as we are used to representing Russia through the Napoleonic retreat, I did not pay too much attention to it.

The closer we got to the goal, the greater was my impatience to discover the true environment of my future stay, because the words of my fellow travelers were beginning to disrupt my enthusiasm. When our coach entered this small town, my first impression brought me great relief. Apart from the degradation of bitumen, we would have "believed to be in France". I had time to notice a stadium with kindergarten, almost welcoming buildings, on a large square a large gymnasium and a supermarket seemed to me, finally nothing that confirmed the words of this grumpy French. I was very happy and remained convinced that I was going to spend a pleasant stay there.

The twenty to twenty-five French people who were usually on the spot, were grouped in the same building, two or three per apartment. The time of the trip I had somewhat sympathized with a welder slightly younger than me, who was on his second stay, and especially with an older than me much less fickle, who was it on his third return. During our distribution by apartment, they tried thus to manage so that we regroup us all three.

As soon as I crossed the door threshold, I felt "at home". There was bathroom, toilets, bedrooms, kitchen with gas and fridge, balcony with survey of the countryside still somewhat snowy and a wonderful sunset, everything was "perfect". Despite the many details of finishing, left in a state of structural work barely conceivable for a French, I do not know why I did not notice then, maybe simply that there is no one more blind than the one who does not want to see. It even seemed to me that all from whom I had received a bad testimony, were people accustomed to their small French bourgeois comfort, to whom the experience of expatriation was probably lacking. They paid attention in this way on details, to make them generalities.

The next morning, when we arrived on the industrial site, I was again strengthened in this direction. A huge concrete building, in which was all the production, preceded another even larger for this type of technology. Here again there were some earthenware tiles peeled off, insulation pipes open, but through good times and bad, it was not worse than elsewhere. The excuse of a certain aspect of dilapidated premises had been this time completely involuntary. I probably counted among the best placed to realize that everything was new, but all having the appearance of workshops in operation for not less than fifteen years, I did not realize at the moment that the unit had never been put into production.

The first noon, I began to discover the local cooking, but was once again obliged to note the bad behavior of French abroad, for whom only French cuisine is worthy of appreciation. That strengthened me in their inexperience of expatriation. At the meal a few sarcasms went certainly here and there, but I attributed them more to differences of political opinion related to the French presidential elections, than to a truly founded malaise concerning the Soviet Union. With a lot of hindsight, I will say now that one and the other was perhaps true.

Apart from Wednesdays and Saturdays when we could have dinner in a dancing restaurant, the other nights we prepared it at the apartment. For this purpose, each weekend we received in rubles a sum almost equivalent to the monthly salary of a local worker responsible of a family, for our pocket money and our shopping for dinner. So we shared household chores with my companions, the eldest in the kitchen, the youngest at the dishes, and me at the shopping.

So, I was going soon to discover a vast pedestrian city, consisting of four to five story buildings surrounded by trees and vegetation. The French brought out generally of it, the image of very popular housing estates, but it was fairly well balanced and all in this late of February was still acceptable in my opinion. The store near which the bus was stopping us in the evening did not escape at the rule in this end of winter, even if the flowerbeds were looking pitiful compared to what they would have been in France. People came in and out as of every store in the world, and no one seemed unhappy at first sight.

I was however going to discover something surprising for the image I had of a country at least equal to ours. Being somewhat greedy, I immediately noticed during this first visit, a confectionary department and chocolates that were certainly not of a superior quality, but had the merit to exist. As for the rest, a quick circular glance gave me the impression that I had arrived on another planet. On that day, like very exceptionally in that place, perhaps there was an half of Kalbassa ¹, or like more frequently, maybe there was also a quarter or half a pork head, but as always, there was certainly had some fleshless pork ribs on the bones. White bones like all well-scratched bones! That day, like any other, that's the maximum, all that could contain the cooked pork meats and butcher's department. The rest of the store consisted only of several display of tin cans, all the same. Bread was not a problem, but for milk we never drank some. It would have been necessary to make in evening or morning, endless queues near a small mobile cistern where it was stocked, at the risk of having to leave without some, the tank being always empty before the end of the distribution.

1) Kalbassa (Колбаса): Big sausage made from fairly lean meats, like ham I think, sold according to the desired length.

I was of course more than apostrophized, but this country remaining for me a "new" country, it was necessary to know how to adapt.

In the second evening, I was going to familiarize myself a little better with my universe of supply. Our cooking equipment being limited, I was going to any trouble to find a frying pan in one of the

four stores of the city. In the one closest to our home, I found one and only one, but if it had a nice glass bell for lid, it did not have a handle and the lid had no more handle either. So I went to the other three "supermarkets". My dictionary in hand I asked, I rummaged, but failing to find another, I returned to seek the only one to sell from the whole city. Handyman by nature, I also bought a big wooden spoon, which we were going to use at one end according to his vocation, and at the other end as handle of frying pan. To eat wasn't the more important thing?

To eat! I was going to discover that eating was actually a problem for many, but it was still a little early for me.

My stay being initially planned for short duration, no desire for integration had appeared to me as motivating. On the contrary, I had planned to spend my week-ends playing sports, both in the countryside and with all the sports equipment available. So I approached the first weekend in this state of mind. I could already see myself running endlessly through the huge icy windswept plains of Ukraine, but my youngest apartment-mate had a lot better to offer me. He had gone out the first two nights, and on Friday came, he tried to persuade me to follow him. I was not really in a state of mind to do so, all the more since he invited me to dinner without any other form of propriety, in a Soviet family that I had not even glimpsed. He insisted, however, with so much implied that, burning of covetousness, I let persuaded and accompanied him.

It seemed to me full of nonsense, to see me in this deserted and icy street, to go down a few buildings below in search of adventure, but what to do? I had left!

The door opened and as he had implied to me, although they were already sit down to the dinner, each of the guests welcomed us with open arms. It was actually a "traditional" Soviet family, parents, children, friends all sitting around a table abundance of food. In fact of friends, there were actually only "lady-friends". I must admit that this did not realize it at the moment, since there were the two big children of the home. They began their meal, so barely entered, we were as thrown sat down to the table.

Except for the charming housewife, one of the friends had appeared to me more than attractive at first glance, but my partner seemed to have the same interest as me for her, so... We ate, ate, at least three dishes different, drank wines of all kinds, champagne, and the inevitable vodka. The conversations were certainly very limited, but it took so long to say so little that the evening passed quickly.

Without knowing it yet, I had just received the carefully worked out model image of the "real" family of the Soviet Union. A not very expansive husband, a wife and girlfriends very pleasant, but nevertheless correct, great children of the age about mine, even if sensually I was remained hungry, my stomach when-at-it had rejoiced.

After my difficult researches of the first week, I was going to discover during the second, another mode of refueling open that one to a minority. Being foreigners, we were considered having priority for the supply, as were the militia, the army and the notorious members of the Communist Party. For this reason, we were received by appointment once a week, in a particular room at the back of the store, and could then buy everything that was excluded from the common run of people non-priority, whatever its function. Although not very varied, the meat abounded there, the wines, the champagne, the preserves of quality, the fine confectionery, everything was there, but where the problem became troublesome, it was at the exit. The bags often overflowing with food, loaded like mules, we then had to cross the whole half empty store, under the envious gaze of the non priority ones. In the back shop, we were frequently meeting soldiers or police, but just like us, they felt the same discomfort and came out ashamed of this place head down, bags closed at best.

In contrast to this type of supply, we had on Saturday morning the fruits and vegetables market open to everyone. Thirty or so women sold all the traditional vegetables of prime necessity, as well as some other local products preserved in salt, oil or vinegar. They moved on foot early in the morning from the surrounding kolkhozes, often several kilometers away. Equipped with small hand-carts or very heavily loaded backpack, they were bringing the fruit of their labor. Prices there were well enough displayed, but so prohibitive that they were almost discouraging despite the huge budget we had in relation to the Soviets themselves.

No less expensive were the shoes that I had to buy very quickly. It was, it is true, a pair of a tennis style a bit western style and not those classic black leather shoes that everyone wore, which

would have been an about ten rubles less ruinous. I had indeed paid the pair forty rubles displayed in the store, two-fifths of a monthly SMIG (guaranteed minimum wage). You do not have to be very good at mental arithmetic, to understand the reasons that forced many of them to walk with pierced black shoes.

I had in this way diminished somewhat, the comparison report, between the Soviet people and the United States as I would have done previously. I had not yet understood everything, and the excuse was still the new country, in which it was necessary to wait for the time of the "harvest". But what harvest?

My meditation on the results of communist politics was going to have to wait again, because the weekend had brought with it the "Saturday Night Fever". So I was going for the first time to this restaurant dancing open on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The building looked very fine outwardly, and had nothing to envy to a French building of the same style, even if it would not last, given the heresy of the system. I must admit, however, that that evening, I was more interested in the encounters I could do there, than in the construction itself. I was besides going to find by chance this pleasant person of this improvised meal, with whom our relations would grow a little until to dance together, not without a hint of mutual interest that was soon to materialize.

The third week was going to be very important for me, because very revealing. All the excuses, I had hitherto found for the Soviets, were going then be sufficiently shaken to open my eyes. Because of the distance, we did not have all the equipment necessary for our work. We sometimes used local tools that we borrowed on the spot, such as big keys for example. A man of twenty-two, twenty-three year-old had therefore been given the role of "key-bearer" and was passing among us, so that we would not have to move around to receive any loan equipment. He was normally visiting us twice a day with two large flat keys in each hand, and remain at our disposal to provide some more specific tools. I did not often use his services, but every time I was forced to do so, after having done three kilometers in the factory looking for him, I always end up to capitulate and wait for his following passage the next morning, sometimes more .

He was very friendly and helpful with us, but his travels often took him where the housekeepers "worked", and disrupted him to the point of forgetting his role as key-bearer for the benefit of....

In this third week, I therefore experienced for the first time this problem, and encountering then a Soviet official woman, I reacted as I would have done in France. I told her of my difficulties and the implausibility of the situation, but although she spoke only very moderately French, her answer was so clear that I perceived unequivocally that it was better to keep silent. Having not yet been confronted with the feeling of superiority, which they generally manifested towards us, I did not understand all the meaning, on the moment. One thing was clear, however, if she had to complain about me again, I would be sent back to France immediately, with my passport visaed in red so I could not go back to work in the Soviet Union. I will return and I quote: "to point at the unemployment in France"???

I was personally working sixty to eighty hours a week at that time, so even though in France unemployment was notorious, I did not understand the allusion. It is only much later and enlightened by other experiences, that I will then remove the real extent of the brainwashing.

In the following days, a technical mishap on a device that I was developing, was going later to bring another surprising confirmation to the naive I was. Forced to inform my company of my difficulties by telephone, the factory management suddenly considered that my position as a technical agent did not correspond to that of my friends workers with whom I shared the apartment and the housework, and assigned me a private apartment the very next day.

In the evening I left my house-mates and went to the floor below. My new room was this time equipped with a "phone", which officially provided me possible communication facilities. I do not dispute the integrality their motivations, but this also offered to them the advantage to easily wiretap us. Too absorbed in the progress of my work, I was not concerned about it in the moment, but later, sometimes it happened to us between French that we play from them. We were talking about a false problem on the phone, and the next day, two days later, it was mentioned in the work meeting. It may not have been very refined, but far from home, the perception of subtlety is sometimes different.

If I remember correctly, the end of this third week was also decisive between me and "Galla", my seductive encounter in the Soviet model family. Gradually, we became indeed friends, so much so

that at my second departure we were considering her arrival in France. So we lived together experiences and contacts that I would never have lived without her, and in particular the learning of Russian. Teenager, she had been a member of the young communists, and had finally married. The excess of alcohol, coupled with the cynicism in which it was drunk by her husband as by many others, had quickly made her a beaten woman. To these difficulties and an atrocity of life having strongly marked her, she had just divorced a year and a half before, although her husband was then captain, with all the privileges that that entailed. Despite the immense gap that separated the two Soviet worlds, that of the persons with priority who lived what seemed to be in certain opulence, and that of the no priority persons deprived of everything, she had preferred to lose all its material advantages to gain serenity. She remained sincerely communist, but a little like a machine without great hope, she tried to cling to life; what we were going to try to do together.

One spring Sunday, I found myself in the dilemma of accepting a family meal at one of his uncles, or spend it alone, distant from each other and from her daughter Allhona. This uncle lived in a small old house on a small plot on the outskirts of Ladijin. We arrived as it is convenient to arrive, but we were the last. The presentations lasted what is usual to meet in a family environment, and although I was somewhat center of interest, I never suffered of it. Very quickly I was even integrated like any other member of the family, which probably was a little the goal of Galla. The food was certainly that of a feast day, but no longer resembled the one I had known at the time of my improvised invitation of the first days, in this "typical Soviet family". There was certainly something to eat as for a feast day, very properly prepared, but absolutely not galore as it was the case in this other family, established by the system to serve as an example. I think I remember that we drank wine, and I probably brought some as well as dessert, but I was not the only one.

Came the digestive, where I could truly measure the difference between the two worlds. The false opulence brought highlighted by the first, had then become the humility of a modest and sympathetic environment, which acts with a sincere heart. There was no more vodka in abundance, because too expensive for the non priority persons, it had made way for "savaghone". It was an alcohol of pure homemade manufacture, of which they had been happy to describe me their method of production. In a large bin, they fermented a mixture of sweetened water and white of bread, in which they macerated some plums from the only tree they had. After obtaining the alcohol content, they distilled by means of a still designed with a pressure cooker, on the steam outlet of which they had installed a copper coil cooled by tap water. I do not tell you of which rotgut it was, but they were happy with the result which, alcohol helping, allowed them to "distract themselves". At the end of the evening Allhona, Galla and I, returned all three home to "us", happy with our daytime.

I take this opportunity to emphasize the fundamental difference between the drinking habits of these people and the generality of those who drink as I alluded with Galla's husband. They had then drunk as mostly partygoers drink in the West. Everyone has fun, drinks, some are more or less drunk. The consequences can range from joy to drama, they can lead to behavior more or less violent depending on the individual, they can even lead quickly to a dangerous addiction, without the knowledge of the person himself. They do not, however, lead directly to the form of depravity and moral dejection that is resulting from the consumption of alcohol that is drunk in this destructive cynicism, which is the way of drinking to "forget". We find more generally the result in the deep alcoholic or in the subjects of a notorious desocialization. A majority of those I had the opportunity to meet at this restaurant on Wednesday and Saturday night drank so. They came to three or four young people. Hardly if they did not arrive on tiptoe so as not to be noticed. They bought one hundred grams of vodka, and one hundred grams after one hundred grams, they were going until to the first one who fell. They were leaving then the place as discreetly as possible, for fear of being arrested by the militia, happy to have had a "good" evening. They returned home, and the release they had not granted themselves, added to all the resentment of their inability to live came out then, and they were striking their wife.

They drank without enthusiasm, without life expectancy, because all motivation was dead in them. I do not know if I express myself properly so that everyone can perceive all the difference? In the circumstances of my current work, I had the opportunity to meet in nineteen ninety-nine, a young Bulgarian girl, with whom we evoked this profound difference between these two ways of drinking, which have only alcohol in common. One is driven by an excess of joie de vivre, the other by

disillusionment and the acceptance to die a little more. It was very well expressed to me by the remark that this person made me with a tight heart.

She told me then, "It's been three years since I live in Nice, and I'm trying to make people understand who I'm living with, the difference with what they know here, but I can see that they do not know it. But with you on the other hand, in five minutes we speak the same language, but we, then, thought it was that, have fun? Now I know! "

They did not know and could not know. How could they have made the difference between true and forgery, when only one form of truth was in their understanding? It's like sailing on a sailboat by a windless sea, when lies are everywhere how is it still possible to believe? This lie already departed from the very negation of the existence of God by the initiators' philosophers of the system, who were certainly not the only culprits, but what could it come out of really good from such a hoax?

If in France in nineteen eighty-one we were centered on the election of President Mitterrand, other events were happening from around the world, and especially in Poland. It was a time of uprisings and general strikes. Remember this Polish Lech Walesa! I was then on the other side of this Iron Curtain, and the television I was beginning to follow gave me all the information they received on their side. Thus, every evening, at the twenty-hour news, a person from a different region of the Soviet Union was interviewed on this issue. They had a very different origin from each other in order to better emphasizing "the uniformity of Soviet thought". One evening they presented an Asian from Vladivostok, the next evening a Nordic from Estonia, and the third evening an Adjarian from Batumi near Turkey, with a turban on his head if necessary. This represented the perfect diversity of the Soviet people, but the uniformity of thought.

The dialogue as for it, was always structured in the same way. The person began by introducing herself and her family, a good father or a good mother, completely sympathetic to the problem of the Polish people. They willingly added that these Poles were absolutely right to claim, no discrimination being acceptable within the "Soviet" people. The second minute, they described their own situation, their way of life, their daily necessities. They did not say that they were in misery, but so that everyone could assimilate to them, they never presented themselves as well-off. They had the concern to raise their children with dignity, with all that that could involve as difficulties. The third minute was devoted to testifying to all the help they could directly bring to the support of the Polish people, notwithstanding the embarrassment that this occasioned them. The fourth minute was used to question the merits of feeding people who chose not to work, to the detriment of their own children and their entire family, as for the fifth and last minute, the conclusion was needed from itself: "It was necessary, whatever the cost, to intervene to put an end to this slump, and if necessary to put them to work by force, to see by..."

Everything was indeed subject to the brainwashing for the valorization of the system, a brainwashing that marked them since an early age in a pernicious way. It's thus that, during a visit to the nursery school in which Galla taught, she had herself pointed out to me, not without some anxiety, the result of a free drawing she had given to do to her little pupils. All without exception had drawn either soldiers, cannons, tanks, soldiers killing each other or marching, nothing else... Was not it upsetting?

However, she did not know how to synthesize it, and as I wrote a few lines ago, it did not prevent her from remaining clearly communist, because the sincerity of most of them was great. This is how one Sunday morning I saw her preparing, almost Sunday, for the day of the Subbotnik (Субботник). The days of the Saturdays and sometimes Communist Sundays, or Subbotniki (singular: Subbotnik) had been introduced and encouraged by Soviet power in the early days of the USSR (1919) and as part of the "war communism". Lenin speaks about it in his pamphlet *The Great Initiative of June 28, 1919*. Communist workers and sympathizers worked free of charge on these days, outside paid hours, to help in the "exalting edification of socialism". The first All-Russian communist Saturday took place on May 1, 1920. Lenin himself took part in the clearing of a building site in the Moscow Kremlin, a scene immortalized by a famous painting by Vladimir Krikhatsky, which shows the Soviet leader wearing a heavy wooden beam.

At that time, in Ladijin, it was no more than days of work graciously offered by each to the community, for the maintenance and renovation of the context of life, only concretely remained that of the Sunday preceding the first of May, in order to preserve ideology. At seven o'clock in the

morning, many of them had begun to go down on the public highway with brushes, shovels, hoes, to clean the streets and the flowerbeds for the festival. Equipped with very modest tools, they had been involved in tasks such as sweeping gutters, pedestrian crosswalks, building environments, whitewashing the borders of sidewalks and flowerbeds. Towards the end of the morning, despite all their heart set to work, the result was very small compared to the extent of the task.

The earth was almost everywhere near all these borders and their means of cleaning almost nonexistent. This gave the first meters of paint a beautiful white lime color, but the following were rather gray. They were even indisputably earth-colored. At noon most of them came back at home to no longer come out again. From the evening, perhaps the next day, a few raindrops came to erase ninety percent of their efforts, but that was however secondary. They had a good conscience, their duty to the community being accomplished. A bit like a useless cult, made to keep a good self-image towards a respected god: The communist ideology.

In these same days, and in the same state of mind, we were going all to be witnesses one of the greatest "technical" inconsistencies, which I was able to observe. I use the word technical, but no doubt you will ask yourself, even for the fewer handymen, if it is possible that such a thing really happened in the Soviet Union at that time. Is it necessary to recall that twenty four years earlier, they had placed their first satellite around the earth (Sputnik one, October 4, 1957)?

Since several weeks the bus connecting our apartment and the site deposited us at noon to the restaurant dancing of the Wednesdays and Saturdays evening. If we usually ate in the great hall, for the circumstances, we were only going to cross it, because a preparation for action was triggered: Before the first of May, they were going varnish again the entire wooden floor. When we entered, we passed close to about ten workers on the war foot, three of whom were already in full work with a very large belt sander. One was pushing, one was pulling and the third was guiding. The tools in hand, the others waited patiently for the sanding to have exceeded the few square meters already worked, to undertake their work. There would have been nothing abnormal about this, if the sander, which was originally equipped with a sawdust recovery system, had been equipped with a very efficient air filter. This one missing, the air was barely breathable and we were barely seeing the opposite wall. So it was obvious that the six or seven who were not yet at work would have had to wait a long time after the sanding of the first three be finished, so that the dust could be removed, before applying the new varnish themselves.

The meal was served off worksite, but the oldest on the site, knowing the problems they had encountered in their functions for years, did not fail to mock as usual, the outcome they imagined very well. I had already seen other enormities that I would tell you soon, but to imagine such an absurdity seemed to me almost displaced at the moment towards technically advanced people. Three-quarters of an hour later, our meal finished, we borrowed to go out, the same path as to come in.

The height of irony was here! The derisions were justified. The users of the big belt sander continued to make a thick dust, while the six or seven others, the brush with one hand, the pot of varnish with the other, were daubing on the ground a mixture of sawdust and varnish which stuck heavily on the brushes. The absurdity, however, did not stop there, because the sawdust absorbing a large amount of varnish, this one lacked very quickly. Of course we saw it on the following Wednesday, because of the two-thirds of the room where the tables were arranged, the floor was effectively covered with a thick rough coating, while the part dance floor and the entrance hall had received no protection.

The humidity was going to quickly do enormous damage on this pretty wood floor. Less than a month later, before my first departure, a swelling about ten centimeters high by two meters in diameter, appeared in front of the bar in the middle. When I came back in September, I noticed that the same phenomenon had occurred even larger, right in the middle of the dance floor. When I returned in September, I noticed that the same bigger phenomenon had occurred right in the middle of the dance floor, and also the huge facade glazed panels that started from the ground level to go up to four or five meters high, were for the majority of them split from the bottom to top. They were certainly not to the point of falling, but although recent, they had already reached their maximum life span.

What's more to add? Do not go imagine, that you would not have wanted to be in the place of the one who was going to be reprimanded. As had been my case, when I had get running after this

key bearer, no Soviet was to blame. They had made all the work in the record time which was assigned to them. They had used the exact quantity of product that was to be used, everything was finished for the May Day festivities, so do not go to make to them carry the hat of the miserable air filter that was missing. It could only be a machine provided by these French who did not even know how to go on the moon...

In the same style, I told you, there are a few pages, a device that I was putting in service had been damaged. So I had therefore made sent the spare parts from France, but to carry out the repairs, I had to remove important traces of calcined glue, of which trichloroethylene only or almost could overcome. This is for those who do not know this product, this is a solvent widely used in the industry. It goes without saying, that being of rather current consumption, but very volatile and dangerous, according to Western good sense, I was envisaging getting it on the spot. I conscientiously conducted research in the four stores of Ladijin, but, useless efforts. I searched, I searched, but did not find any! So I spoke to the French director of the entire assembly of the factory, so that he tries to get it from the maintenance department of the imposing neighboring thermal power station, lost time. They did not have any either! In the same irony as the varnished parquet, I was provided with oil and wood alcohol. So I spoke to the most resourceful of our interpreters who said to me, "do not worry Alain, in a few days I'm going to Vinnitsa (a city of more three hundred thousand inhabitants in the southeast of Kiev), I'll bring some you back!"

This nice man of about thirty-five years, very kind, helpful and devoted to the possible, had the habit to turn and turn again his hair, whenever he was in embarrassment, which almost always put his hair in battle. We often laughed of it kindly, but on his return from Vinnitsa, he was particularly badly capped. He immediately came to me and said, "I'm annoyed, I did not find one, but do not worry, on that date, I'm going to Kiev, I'll bring some you back". On the appointed day, as in a well-mounted comedy, he came back, of course, from Kiev, his hair still tousled, and in a sorry voice he gave me the same answer. He told me this time, "do not worry Alain, I'm going to Moscow next week, I'll bring some you back!". The comedy would of course make a mockery, because he returned from Moscow, his hair more than ever in battle, looking contrite, saying "I do not know why, but we have storage problems, I have not some found".

I know that he was doing personally very well the difference between our supply system and theirs, which he was very sorry for. He had come several times to France to accompany technical or commercial groups, and as little as we could sometimes exchange, he envied us inevitably.

Others, who gave reason for the brainwashing they suffered without perceiving it, remained firm and sincere in their convictions, as was the case with Galla. It happened to me frequently thus, at the beginning of our meeting, to want to explain to her in good faith, how we lived in France. Evoking my schedule with my wife, the shopping in the shops, but also the auto-cross races at which I participated on Sunday, finally the banal of the life of a couple. Of course, I added the details that she could not know without having experienced them, the biggest differences between Ladijin's life and ours, and here, every time, I encountered the same answer from her. : "I do not speak about politics". Once, twice, as someone who thinks he has not expressed himself for lack of a good command of the language, I took my dictionary and patiently was reconstructing my sentence. At the end of my development, once again I was coming up against to this answer: "I do not speak politics".

I needed several of these experiences, and much better comprehend the language to understand the reasons. Politics and those who were in charge of management, were first the directors of industrial sites, because eminent members of the Communist Party. They directed and governed to the local politics of distribution. So it was these managers close to the workers, who defined some very individual priorities. That of our privileged supplies for example, of which we were benefiting as foreigners or that of this family bringing to the French the good image of the standard Soviet family.

In theory, it was not a privilege given to men, but a social institution managed by the guardians of the good respect of the established rules, which defined with "fairness" the exceptional needs. There was no longer any possible guarantor of probity without them, since they were considered as being models of integrity. The director of the industrial unit in which we participated, had therefore not been selected because firstly of his technical or commercial skills, but for the "political" recognition of which he was the object. He had been able to choose among the good

and loyal communists, a family deeply rooted in communism, who would not suffer the detrimental influence of the luxury which it would show to the "little Frenchmen", they too obtuse to understand the good and noble Soviet motivations. The respect of these fundamental values, against internal or external offenders, was therefore ensured by a strong and well-nourished militia or army, unlike the rest of the population. Like God above all men, the venerated system reigned through its adulated representatives.

In my naivety due to my ignorance of their structures, I was trying to explain to Galla, what a store looked like in which at the supermarket we found the heaps of oranges piled up, to the point that if we took the one from underneath, all the whole heap would fall. She, though ex-captain's wife, had seen or eaten an orange one day and saw or ate a banana. I forgot the order in which she had said me. With such a personal experience, how could she understand what I was trying to explain to her? She "knew" what she recognized as right, that this privilege given to all as we lived it was a heresy from which the Soviet people were usefully protected, in order not to squander the food of those poor Africans whom we were starving. The thing was conceivable at a pinch for her in order to meet the special needs of the priority persons, raised above the ordinary mortals as the Guardians of the Temple of the Law that they made respect, that's all. I do not narrate it to you in a subversive way, like a synthesis born of my Christian conversion, but exactly as I already discovered it on the spot, I who had left convinced to find there a just rational cause, I discovered only that a profound mental distraction. A small smile on the lips to relax a little, so I will say as they said then "I do not do politics"!

I do not really want to enter into the considerations that could become distribution policy, whether it is right or not to live and feed ourselves as we do in our consumer society. This is not our subject of comparison, because what also allowed me to become aware of the enormity of their error was in some hints, about "these little French who were not going on the moon, to whom they gave alms". They also had irrefutable proof: They were never operating! For good reason, they were managed like the varnished parquet...

They bought us factories to help the French in their misery faced with unemployment, since they were the great lords sustaining the planet, who would have given bread to a rabid dog. I do especially not say it to make fun of their individual sincerity, which we must respect, because I know that in them there was more than a simple ideology, there was a purity in the hope to which they always gave reason because of their naivety to give reason to the lie. But ... they "knew"! Yes, they knew that any French present in the Soviet Union, were in fact only unemployed who had learned their lesson to deny the obvious. It was a waste of time and effort to say them the opposite or even simply trying to approach the subject, they "knew", as they "knew" that to hide our misery we went so far as to lie brazenly, denying such evidence.

What to answer? What to say for our defense when each word utters we make matters worse a little more? I never knew it. In those years, I was for my part overwhelmed with work. There was certainly a lot of unemployment at that time in France, and this phenomenon was used by their leaders as a subversive means to justify the impoverishment of the people, in favor of their frantic race to maintain their global brand image faced with the United States. This people, to whom it was given by brainwashing an image of equality with the Americans, lived in a state of inconceivable underdevelopment. This is what I believe that allowed me to open my eyes, but also that which was for them the triggering phenomenon of their animosity towards us. They perceived us for this reason as ungrateful liars who did not even have the recognition of the belly towards those who fed them. The possibility of lack of labor theoretically not in the imagination of their structure, an income was therefore directly related to work. If it did not exist, they created it, like that of this key holder, of whom I spoke to you.

You may understand better why it was so insignificant that our factories produce, since this brought thus to everyone, the proof of our structural errors, our lack of knowledge and their greatness in relation to the west to which they were making alms through human charity. It is also why all those poor unfortunates at the bottom of the social ladder were so convinced of never being able to trust the French. For the "good" cause, the head was concealing their, its deep imbalances by frauds organized to a greater or lesser scale, which allowed to a popular mass of a miserable standard of living, to take themselves for the equals of the Americans.

I knew a few who did not think so, but they were very few. One of them was working at the nearby thermal electrical power station, which was putting a motorbike on loan at the disposal of its employees to promote motocross. In this system of priorities that reigned at all levels, he had therefore applied to the steering of this motorbike to his director, and had registered on a list of about ten applicants. That enabled them to do about one race a year, each in turn. If one of them would win once, it would be proven that he was better than the others and would become a person with priority in this area. He could then claim the personal attribution of a motorcycle.

The motorbike to their disposal was no longer very young, but after the race and the previous driver, the latter having made the engine revving, it was supposed to be able to serve again. The day before the race, like trichloroethylene that I could not get, a piece was missing to this driver and friend so that the engine works properly. He had worked and reworked the old part for the long time defective, but had obtained an unreliable result, to which he wanted to believe. This is perhaps the worst because disappointed hopes leave deep scars.

From the morning I was at his side to support him, and from the first moment he made me a real good impression. This was not going however last long, because in the middle of the morning, the "He-Men arrived": the priority pilots. Those latter had good motorbikes because they were initially part of the priority system, army, militia and communist party. It would have been possible to confuse them with the actors of the movie *Germinal*, so much their transport vehicles seemed to emerge from another era, but when they started their precious machines, a "mewing" strident went out of five or six machines and allowed to understand the world that separated them from the non-priority ones.

From the first laps of the race our man intercalated very well, and finished third of the first leg, but very quickly the defective piece gave way. Like all other non-priority pilots, he began to descend from his heavy machine in the strongest climbs, where a simple moped could have perhaps climbed without pedaling. Only the first five had never dismounted. He finished sixth of the race, and first of the non priority pilots. This was not announced at the awards ceremony, since they were supposed starting all with the "same" chance of success. The proof of the honesty of the system was made: Justice prevailed in Russia; the priority persons remained the best and therefore had to remain with priority. As for him, if nothing came to overturn the course of time, he would run out until death to run next to his motorbike in the hope of winning once.

Derision of the derisions, it was enough for him to go faster on foot than motorbike, and he would become himself a priority person. Whoever receives a Citroën Two Horses to compete at a Grand Prix of Formula One, would receive the same justice since he too would have a four-wheeled vehicle. If he won with his Citroën two horses, he would be given a formula one. If not there would probably be other races... It was enough for him to wait for his turn! As for the motorbike, no doubt he would find the same the following year, but this time with a year more, and inevitably with the same defective parts.

Some were trying to live; others did not have much to lose. This was the case of an old gentleman, who sometimes came to visit us at our apartments, in which, however, we were not allowed to receive any Soviets. He always went right for cheating the women guards at the bottom of the stairs. They ran behind him, but once at our side, they dared not tell him anything.

He had made the war of nineteen forty, in the deportation camps where he had known two Frenchmen. On his return, he had a regular correspondence with them, until, for that reason alone, he had been arrested and taken to a Siberian gulag ¹, in which he was stayed seventeen years, if I remember correctly. He still spoke French relatively well, to which he had remained attached as in the image of paradise. The latter, although remaining discreet in the street, not trying to return where he came from, did not hesitate to express himself on the inconsistencies of the system, even in the apartments equipped with telephone which were frequently watched.

1) Gulag (гyлар): Concentration camps organization made available mainly to the political police, who managed the Gulag forced labor camps in the Soviet Union. These camps were mostly located in very inhospitable places, such as Siberia.

We were not personally feeling this lack of freedom because we were traveling in the city at our ease, but we were not entitled to more than seven kilometers from the village. We had a loan bike

in the same condition as the motorbike, but a Frenchman who had been seen fourteen kilometers away had been expelled. Since that day the bicycle, whose wheel was puncture, had been hanging on a nail, and we were walking on foot. The unsuspecting ones we were did not suffer too much the heavy oppression of the militia, because locally the majority of them were not wearing the uniform, but when Galla and I arrived to walk with our friends, every hundred or a hundred and fifty meters, at the passage of some people, it was the same words: "Hush! The militia"! This is obviously not a secret for anyone, but this monitoring was permanent.

The woman's freedom

One thing was less known, the "Freedom of the Woman". If I did not address it earlier, it was because it was not an inequality, but rather a too great equality. In our modern society, many professions are now more accessible to women than they were before, but this was not really the case in Ukraine at that time. The shovel and pickaxe were much more convenient than any mechanical machine so often out of order. Such were thus the sweepers of the streets.

Mechanical sweepers obviously existed because of the fact that I saw one, one time, moving in a huge cloud of dust, watering probably not working. It is not of those however which it is act, because if I resumed the subject of defective equipment, I would have the impression of repeating myself. Of course, I want to talk about these imposing ladies, who are usually not very young, who roamed the streets, a huge broom of birch in their hands. The body bent double, they advanced heavily to the rhythm of their immense tool. I would not want to exaggerate, but only one swept in a single pass the street behind our building where two cars crossed easily. That it rains, that it sells, that it snows, they were there, faithful to the post. The same was true of garbage collection. Small metal stairs were arranged for this purpose from place to place at the bottom of the buildings. The open dump truck, which was driven by a man, was stopping nearby, and each one, with his dustbin in his hand, was climbing up the stairs to get rid of his rubbish in the back dumpster. Numerous were the men who came to do the climbing gymnastics of the small stairs, but in the dumpster, to wade through the trash to spread them with their feet, clinging to the sides rail for fear of spreading herself in their stinking work at the slightest blow of the brake or accelerator, it was always one of those same imposing women.

There were other fields in which the woman excelled; it was in the trades of road mender, mason or roofer. I do not speak here of the feminine exceptions as there also exists in West, but of a large proportion. The men were crane operators or heavy appliance driver, but the ladies were shoveling and picking, or pulling the concrete with heavy mason's rules.

In the same kind of register as that of varnished parquet, shortly after my arrival, we had been spectators of a group of female road menders. It was in the first weeks of my first stay, because it was still very cold, I think we were in early March. In the neighborhood of our building, the road had seriously deteriorated at the end of winter, and a large cavity two to three meters in diameter had formed near a crossroads. Once again, a noon that the bus was taking us to the restaurant, we saw nearby a trailer of smoking asphalt. Just like for the band sander, the ones most scoffing and perhaps also the most lucid, did not fail to make some hints accompanied by a sarcastic laugh, on the style "I can guarantee you that they will wait for the bitumen cools"!

On our return after lunch, five women with shovels and rakes were very busy around the trailer near the hole. Two of them, equipped with shovels they used as picks, tried to detach a large block of asphalt. Another, on the ground, with a rake, was trying to make it fall, while the last two waited.

I do not think it is possible to laugh of it, so ridiculous was the situation and came very close to the wretch. The saddest thing was the impotence of good will flouted in the heart of each of these women. We were going discovered the result the same evening on our come back. They had succeeded in dropping in the middle of the hole, a huge block of bitumen at least sixty to seventy centimeters to the cube, representing approximately the value of the total volume of the cavity, but not spread out because cooled too early. He stayed there for several days until a big crawler

tractor, much used over there, passed over it and crush it a bit. The trucks then gradually began to climb over it likewise, then the lighter vehicles.

It was still high enough when I left at the end of May, but when I came back in September, warmth helping, it had spread a little. The original cavity, however, had done the same way, and represented almost the entire road, only the mound of bitumen remained in its middle.

I let you appreciate the thing without further comment. Everything is certainly not perfect here, and perhaps we could find similar examples here and there, but it was so much the daily rule, that it showed well their moral disenchantment.

Just like these ambivalences existed, as much a minimal risk could be protected by draconian security rules as it could be the opposite in a total unconsciousness, to conceal a bad organization. This was the case at our place of work for the transfer of concentrated phosphoric acid, which is widely used in the food processing industry. It was stored in glass carboys on the ground floor and was brought from floor to floor, up to the highest point, by very narrow steep stairs. Two young women, equipped with a kind of wooden stretcher arranged to receive the heavy container, climbed regularly all the way from the bottom until the top. The first was climbing backwards, bended double, with the handles of the stretcher at a level often inferior to that of her feet, and the other hoisted on tiptoe with her arms raised to the point of losing her breath, trying to keep an half -horizontal to the whole, so that the glass carboy not even attached does not topple. If by misfortune this one had fallen, the woman below and those who worked on the lower floors, could have been very badly burnt by the projections. After this perilous exercise, when it came to pouring this smoking acid in the system provided for this purpose, the "staging" of perfect safety was respected.

Luckily, I was never witness to an accident, although statistically it was inevitable. In writing this, of course, I am thinking of the unfortunate women who, one day or another, are going to die or should live forever disfigured, and made blind by acid burns. Worse still are all these radioactive storage of the most dangerous for the planet, which can still exist in these countries, but what to be done, in front of this stupidity? At the time when man could have had some interests to act, motivation no longer existed, so now that they are nothing more than worthless storage in the face of the daily need for survival... I do not know the current circumstances, but I imagine willingly.

All these most absurd conditions were experienced especially by women. I cannot guarantee that throughout the Soviet Union it was so, but it seems that the case has been generalized. In such an "equality" of the woman, nothing differentiated her more from the man, if not a condition of which Galla brought me the facts, attached as to it, to the femininity. She was having it equated with the lack of righteousness of only one man, more than to the inconsistency of the system, she had reported the facts to me with a certain rancor. An obstetrician of whom she had needed services a few years earlier was the center.

The abortion was free and free of charge, and she found herself pregnant one day, she went directly to the hospital where no problem arose. This doctor had received her and told her how was little the legal care, in relation to the needs of this kind of intervention. She could, however, if she wished, to undergo additional useful care, but it would cost her twenty rubles of cash. The monthly wage of a worker was then one hundred and four rubles. She was absolutely well aware of the deception, convinced that she would only get the only care she was entitled to, but had paid for fear of receiving only half of it. That day, for fear of complications still possible, four other women had accepted the bargaining.

The calculation is rapid, by illegal means, this doctor had procured in only one day, the monthly salary of a worker. Some may see it as an illegal means in this context, practiced almost legally at home in the private sector. The difference, however, lay much more in the possibilities of spending this money than in the fraudulent way of earning it. Any major purchase was subject to the priority system. The priority persons were, as we have already seen, the eminent members of the Communist Party, the militia and the army. For this "little surgeon" of campaign, as for any other worker, it was therefore impossible for him to use this money swindled, for any home or vehicle purchase, not even live in a more luxurious than others. It would have been necessary for this luxury to be available in stores in which it was entitled to access as a non-priority. The only stores where the money allowed to buy freely being the Berioskas ¹ (Берёзка), but it needed foreign currencies for that. So he only had to spend this daily fortune on the black market and Vodka!

1) Beriozka (Берёзка): Stores reserved for the only customers who had possibility to pay in foreign currency, that is to say no Soviet other than the high officials and important members of the communist party. They were located near the tourist centers, and were the object of much covetousness. There was the most of the consumer products that were missing elsewhere. Muscovite taxi drivers, for example, were trading black with the tourists at a very attractive rate, and were developing a parallel trade. I had the opportunity to drink freeze-dried coffee from this source at a friend's house lady in Ladijin, while the nearest beriozka was more than a thousand kilometers to my knowledge.

This doctor whose "fortune" was until not know what to do with it, therefore indulged in alcohol with friends and especially friends girls and ladies, but also to all forms of sexual debauchery, it goes without saying. The feeling of dissatisfaction of life had become to them what it was to those who sat down to drink vodka until they fell to believe themselves happy.

It is through this state of mind unfortunately widespread, each at his level, that the crooked priority persons found their buyers and could amass gigantic fortunes in a colossal and organized black market. At the opening of the free trade market of the new Russian capitalism, it is also these kind of well-placed characters who developed the structures of the new system. It is in the hands of these characters that are today many Russian fortunes.

At the time of my first stay I had swapped two jeans to a "motorist" for three hundred rubles, or the official exchange of the time, two thousand four hundred francs (360 €), which they still sold again the double.

If I wrote, motorist in quotation marks, it is to emphasize well, that if he was a motorist, he was a priority person and further corrupted. I barely saw him, the value being concluded in advance, and the exchange, as for thieves, having been done by the open window of the car, at nightfall.

Perhaps some people understand better why huge Soviet fortunes now invade the French Riviera, but also what the foundations of the new Russian capitalism represent.

September 1981: The reunions

I believe, however, that I would never say enough how many of those I had the opportunity to meet were pleasant people, of whom I have an unforgettable memory. When I found them again in September, nature had of course changed, but they had remained the same. I would say maybe even more endearing, knowing them better. Galla and Allhona were waiting for me impatiently and our reunion was very happy. Our friends were also waiting for me, friends I have not told you about yet, with whom we met very often. After her divorce, Galla had spent several months at their home waiting for an apartment to be assigned to her, and very strong ties had been forged between them.

They had two children, she was a stay-at-home mom and he was hospital agent. They were both very kind. At their home, as at Galla's uncle, I saw the true dimension of the Soviet family. We often used to have meal together and we shared a lot of things. Two or three times, we arrived unconsciously, to present ourselves at their home unexpectedly at mealtime. With an embarrassed look, each time they made us wait five to ten minutes in the entrance, and bustled themselves to modifying their own food a little. This certainly did not happen often, but each time I found myself very embarrassed. After a few minutes of waiting, they settled us at the table, and we shared the best. There were then a few pieces of meat or mushrooms mixed with the only potatoes that made up their meal beforehand. Decently, they had quickly opened a small bottled preserves.

These bottled preserves were not canned foods bought at the store, because even those were still almost too expensive. With family and friends, on Sundays we were sometimes going arm in arm on a picnic in the woods. He, like every day of every year, in the city or in the country, put like so many others the same black shoes pierced.

After the meal, the best entertainment was picking the mushrooms of which they made canned. When the baskets were full, a little like children happy to live, we played "blind man's buff" or at the cat and mouse in the fields of recently harvested wheat. It was for me like a return to basics, a return to a simple life, I was happy because the next day I was going to have something else, but for them...?

They had only this motivation necessary for their survival. They knew that after that, there would still be the same gloomy life, the same black shoes pierced. They were certainly happy with these family entertainments, but their horizon of hope was so limited that a snail would have quickly reached it.

The wheat harvest was not the same as in our campaigns. In my childhood, I had learned in primary school that these immense plains of Russia and Ukraine were the breadbasket of Europe. So I was running in the "breadbasket", forced to see that it was not far from empty. When I was child, I ran constantly. Everywhere I went, I ought to run, except maybe to go to school, but to come back, I was always the first... I do not tell you how many times I came back the lower legs scratched by the stubble, when, at one of my grandmothers in the countryside, I ran in the fields after the harvest. I have somewhat lost this habit, but I remember very well how much these stubbles were close to each other, and how many were also the grains of wheat on the ears; but in this "breadbasket of Europe", the problem no longer existed, so much the culms were distant from each other. As for the ears, when we were discovering some fallen on the ground, they were so short and the grains so small that they looked almost like wild grass.

Just as these fields were very pitiful, likewise were the crops of the gardens. Around the month of April, it seems to me, big crawler tractors had come by night to plow the whole field behind home. Nearby nobody had could sleep, but in the morning it was almost a party. Everyone was happy and full of motivation for the future harvest. In the following days, three people came to define and allocate plots for the garden applicants. One passed with an immense surveyor's compasses, another bounded the parcels and a third wrote down on paper. For me, who had from time to time gardened and who had a horror of the digging over, when I had witnessed this organization, even if I had not shouted bravo saw the folklore that reigned around, I had been almost seduced. Two things, however, had remained as disconcerting questions, the distance to walk to get there, and the lack of watering system. As soon as the parcels were known, a majority rushed however to work.

The greenery had sprouted everywhere at the end of May I left Ladijin, these gardens were not very early, but I was going to discover the result in September. A lot of grass had then grown, as for the vegetables, they were all or almost like the wheat fields. Everyone, however, had developed a lot of energy, but only those who had the chance to live nearby had acceptable harvests. For others, plunged in a misery similar to that of Gerard Depardieu in *Manon of the Spring*¹, their "pumpkins" had more or less finished wither. If the thing had not been so serious for these unfortunate, we could almost laugh today...

1. Dramatic movie, great classic of French cinema in which Gerard Depardieu plays the role of a hunchbacked teacher born of unknown father who returns to the natal land following an inheritance received from his deceased mother. With a wealth of his intellectual knowledge of which his new neighbors mock, he will be hated by a malignant majority and especially a rich and influential man who covets the property for the benefit of his son. Helped by this latter, he will plug the only source of water that would have made possible to the hunchback the culture of his piece of land lost in the mountains. Relentlessly, accompanied by his wife and his young daughter this unfortunate hunchback will be exhausted to death to water his crops of "coucourdes" (pumpkins) with a few containers filled at a source located far up the mountain.

The denouement of the monstrousness will show that this good man in the eyes of all the population remained silent, had become criminal of his own unknown son, result of an illegitimate love of his young years whose heart had never healed.

The only reasonably correct crops of private individuals were not located in a usual place in the West, but around many buildings, they were flourishing. It was not all the green spaces, but many

lawns at the bottom of the buildings, were cultivated by some. Everything was like this: "The untangling". In their miserable situation, this resourcefulness was moreover no longer a game as some might imagine, but was part of their conditions of survival, in habits taken over time. This necessity had ended up veiling their minds about the huge black market of the priority persons, the rich of then and the even more powerful of today.

September was ending; the leaves had already their autumn appearance. My installations were working properly, and others were waiting for me in milder climes. So, the time of separation had arrived. As for the way of life, I was very happy to leave, but I however had a heavy heart towards all those charming and kind people who were not aware of the moral misery in which they lived, and who thought they were Americans or else better than them, so much was the lie around them. My return was going to bring me one last proof of all this almost prison system, in which the man without God lives free as in a prison. I was not going indeed to delay receiving the most tender letters, which I was about to answer. Letters after letters, however, the tone of her letters was going to evolve. She began to complain about receiving nothing from me, owing to the fact I did not keep my promises. She wrote to me, but received nothing in return. Five or six months passed thus, without any of all my letters reaching her.

The mail hardly controllable to the expedition, because mixed with the multitude, came to me, but hers, easy to watch in return to the distribution never arrived to her. Once again the evidence was made that Westerners were ungrateful people who did not hold their promises. In front of any brainwashing, man is powerless.

I gradually put this crazy love story behind me. I was going to have to wait a few more years to meet it, but I was vaccinated forever from all my communist ideologies instituted as a religion by man.

In wanting to create a better civilization without God, whose tsars had left them with such a bad image, they built on human bases, the worst of what man can do. God, whom they had considered as the source of human misery and of whom they had so carefully protected themselves, was nevertheless the only one capable of leading them to success. We will see it in the next chapters. They actually imitated what they knew and yet condemned. The human without God being able to reproduce only the image which he possesses in him, they recreated what they had rejected. The privileges had certainly changed sides, but like any human equipped with his only good will, they were not going to possess more integrity than the previous ones.

It is also the consequences to which we expose ourselves, if we do not open the eyes of our souls.

Provided we do it before it's too late!