

## THE LAST LETTER. ON THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN VLADIMIR GHIKA AND JACQUES MARITAIN\*

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**RIASSUNTO:** *L'ultima lettera. Sulla corrispondenza fra Vladimir Ghika e Jacques Maritain.* Tra il 1920 e il 1945, il Beato Vladimir Ghika e il filosofo francese Jacques Maritain condussero un ricco epistolare. Nonostante le avversità, più di trecentottanta lettere si sono conservate fino ad oggi. Iniziato nei “ruggenti anni Venti”, lo scambio si concluse bruscamente sulla soglia della Seconda Guerra Mondiale. Il presente articolo si concentra sull'ultimo pezzo della corrispondenza: la lettera scritta da Ghika a Maritain il 18 luglio 1945. Dopo averne indagato il contesto e sotteso il significato per le parti direttamente coinvolte, lo studio si pone la domanda dell'eventuale rilevanza per il lettore contemporaneo. La traduzione inglese dell'“ultima lettera”, come pure di quella che la precede, sono fornite in Appendice, insieme a una tabella riassuntiva dei temi e delle emozioni espresse nell'ultima lettera.

**Parole-chiave:** Vladimir Ghika, Jacques Maritain, guerra, amore, fede, agire, ricostruzione

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**REZUMAT: *Ultima scrisoare. Despre corespondența dintre Vladimir Ghika și Jacques Maritain.*** Timp de un sfert de secol, Prințul Vladimir Ghika și filosoful francez Jacques Maritain au întreținut o bogată corespondență. În ciuda adversităților, peste 380 de scrisori au reușit să ajungă până la noi. Inițiat la începutul „nebunilor ani ‘20”, schimbul epistolar pare să se întrerupă brusc la începutul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial, pentru a fi reluat în 1945 – an din care nu ni s-a păstrat decât o singură și ultimă scrisoare. Prezentul articolul se concentrează asupra acestei scrisori trimise de Ghika lui Maritain pe 18 iulie 1945. După investigarea contextului și sublinierea semnificației scrisorii pentru părțile direct implicate, studiul caută să pună în evidență posibilă relevanță a experienței celor doi prieteni pentru cititorul contemporan. O traducere în engleză a originalului francez a „ultimei scrisori”, precum și a celei anterioare ei, este disponibilă în Appendix, împreună cu un tabel care rezumă temele conținute în ultima scrisoare și corolarul lor emoțional.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Vladimir Ghika, Jacques Maritain, război, iubire, credință, acțiune, reconstrucție

*Faith..., if it does not have works, is dead.*  
(James 2:17)

*L'amor che muove il sole e le altre stelle.*  
(Dante, *La Divina Commedia*, final verse)

*The fruit of prayer is faith.*  
*The fruit of faith is love.*  
*The fruit of love is service.*  
(Mother Teresa)

## 1. Introduction

Between 1920 and 1945, Blessed Vladimir Ghika and the French philosopher Jacques Maritain conducted a rich epistolary. Defying all odds, more than three hundred and eighty of their letters are still preserved today. Initiated at the beginning of the “Roaring Twenties”, the exchange ended abruptly with World War II. Ghika and Maritain’s letters give us a privileged

perspective on the shifting of times, as it is seen through the eyes of two friends who shared a common pursuit. Whether through philosophical discourse, contemplation or active charitable works, Ghika and Maritain devoted their lives to making God's truth and love known to those whom they perceived as spiritually and/or materially destitute.

This article focuses on the last item of their epistolary: Ghika's letter to Maritain, written on July 18, 1945. After investigating its context and underlying its significance for the immediate parties involved, the study looks into the possible relevance that Ghika and Maritain's experience may have for the contemporary reader. English translations of the "last letter" and of the previous one are provided in the Appendix, along with a summary of the contents of the last letter.

## **2. Two giants of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>**

Vladimir Ghika (1873-1954) and Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) first met in Paris, probably in one of its many intellectual circles, in or shortly before 1920 (details of their first encounter are unknown). World War I had just ended and, in the effervescent atmosphere of those years, their first acquaintance quickly grew into a prolific daily collaboration.

The Romanian prince and the French scholar had several things in common. First of all, they were both converts to Catholicism. Born in 1873 in Constantinople, where his father had been sent on a diplomatic mission, Vladimir Ghika was the descendant of an old royal family. Raised in the Greek Orthodox tradition, in 1902 – to the great chagrin of his devout mother – he converted to Catholicism. "I did it in order to be a better Orthodox", Ghika would explain some time later. Jacques Maritain, on the other hand, was born in Paris in 1882, in a Protestant family. His father and his maternal grandfather were both lawyers. The latter, Jules Favre, quite influential in his

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<sup>2</sup> For the biographical information presented below, I refer to two main sources: Jean-Luc Barré, *Jacques et Raïssa Maritain – les Mendiants du Ciel – Biographies croisées*, Paris 1995, and Francisca Băltăceanu, Andrei Brezianu, Monica Broșteanu, Emanuel Cosmovici, Luc Verly, *Vladimir Ghika – Profesor de speranță*, Bucharest 2013.

own time, was distantly related to Saint Peter Faber<sup>3</sup>, but by the time Jacques Maritain was born his branch of the family was no longer Catholic and had become quite anticlerical. Highly independent and already a deep thinker, in 1906 young Jacques converted to Catholicism, along with his Jewish wife Raïssa. For both Jacques and Raïssa, the conversion came at the end of an intense and painful spiritual quest.

Apart from being both converts, Ghika and Maritain also shared many intellectual pursuits. Born in a family of diplomats, after studies in Natural, and then Political Science in France, and a doctorate in Theology in Rome, Ghika followed in the diplomatic career tradition of his family. At the time he met Maritain, Ghika was living in Paris with his brother Dimitrie, who was doing diplomatic work at the Paris Peace Conference<sup>4</sup> where, grace to his many relations and networking skills, he helped promoting the political recognition of his recently unified country, Romania. At the same time, Ghika had been asked by the Belgian Primate, Cardinal Mercier, to help restore the Library of the Catholic University of Louvain, which had suffered great damage during the war. He was also involved in a series of intellectual, religious and charitable projects, ranging from giving conferences – on Dante, for example – to finding homes for poor artists, or working on a new monastic foundation.

Maritain, too, had divided his initial interests between philosophy and biology. After a stage in Germany devoted to a research in biology, Maritain settled firmly on philosophy, embarking on a teaching career in Paris. One year after World War I had ended, in September 1919 Jacques and Raïssa Maritain hosted the first meeting of what was to become the Thomistic Studies Circle. Pretty soon Ghika became a member, too, attending the Circle as often as his busy agenda would allow him. The Circle continued uninterrupted almost until the beginning of World War II in 1939.

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<sup>3</sup> Saint Peter Faber (French name, Pierre Favre, 1506-1546), was one of the first companions of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and the first to be ordained a priest in the newly established Jesuit Order.

<sup>4</sup> In December 1919, Vladimir Ghika's brother, Dimitrie, was delegated to attend the Peace Conference in Paris, where, among other things, the modern state of larger Romania was officially recognized as an independent, political entity.

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In the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century norms of political and social involvement, some might see Ghika and Maritain as social and religious activists. That being said, the core motivation of their almost frenetic, life-consuming dedication – as it comes across from reading their letters – is to be identified in the concern for the eternal salvation of the souls they encountered. To make God’s love known, to advance His Kingdom – in individuals as well as in society as a whole –, was not just a moral duty to Ghika and Maritain: it was their passion. Along with his teaching and writing career, Maritain also embarked on an intense apostolate among artists and writers, including those belonging to the Parisian Diaspora (mainly Russian and Jewish refugees). In this field, Ghika worked side by side with his friend. Moreover, Ghika ministered to the impoverished workers of the Parisian outskirts. Both Maritain and Ghika wrote extensively and travelled abroad frequently on missions and conferences.

This list of shared interests and activities could go on, in a more detailed and documented manner, but this is not the purpose of the present paper. What has been said so far is only meant to illustrate the substance of their first 20 years of correspondence, from 1920 to 1939. Of their rich epistolary, as stated above, many letters went missing: destroyed, or maybe still lying hidden in some forgotten drawer. In fact, it is a miracle that this deposit of letters is still with us – in spite of a world war and several changes of address across borders (and overseas). If these letters have been kept, it is because both their authors (and those who took risks to salvage them after Ghika’s and Maritain’s deaths) saw in this set of correspondence something significant, something that goes beyond mere happenstance.

Yet, at first glance, one may remain rather unimpressed with the contents of these letters. Highly personal, the topics Ghika and Maritain talk about are mainly “administrative matters” – meetings, errands, hints and tips connected to various situations, requests for assistance or intercession for this or that person in need – and, of course, exchanges about their ongoing philosophical or theological projects. Most of the letters come across as having been written in great hurry: giving essential information, asking brief questions, passing on ideas... This can only suggest that their real, deep conversations happened face to face; in fact, Ghika and Maritain were both

based in the Paris area and their agendas show us that they met often – even several times a week. However, in those times when telephones were rare and internet inexistent, written letters were the primary alternative to face to face meetings. When various engagements prevented them from seeing each other on a certain occasion, or when they were out of Paris, the two friends used to write to each other frequently, sometimes daily.

Embedded in this “work relationship”, their letters illustrate an underlying mutual love and respect, a confidence which only arises from two souls that have recognized and opened to each other. Through the years, this reciprocated trust would take many forms. For instance, in 1923, after becoming a priest at the age of 50, Ghika asked his friend Maritain, almost ten years his junior, to be his spiritual accountant and hold him responsible whenever he would perceive some failure in Ghika’s thought or behaviour.

Maritain, on the other hand, would often ask for Ghika’s assistance in matters of spiritual guidance, as well as in Church related issues. For example, after the Maritains moved to Meudon, Ghika advised them on how to get permission for establishing a home chapel; and it is interesting to read in their letters to what length Ghika went researching, on behalf of his friend, even those details which to a layman may seem insignificant – like whether there should be a step to the altar of the chapel, and how tall...

### **3. One war and one ocean in between**

Ghika and Maritain’s correspondence reveals a close and warm cooperation. Based on a communion of spiritual interests, their friendship was certainly supported by physical proximity (the Parisian area), but continued unchanged even during long periods of separation, when one or both friends were out of town, for rest or for missionary and/or intellectual work. In the interest of brevity, I will offer only a few highlights of Ghika and Maritain’s activities spanning the “Roaring Twenties” to the terrible Forties. During this time, Jacques Maritain became a world acclaimed philosopher, travelling extensively to give lectures and conferences throughout Europe, Latin America, the USA and Canada. When at home, in Meudon, the Circle of Thomistic Studies established by Maritain and his wife Raïssa attracted a wide variety

of intellectuals, artists and scientists. Between the two World Wars, Maritain published no less than forty books, from *Art et scholastique* in 1920 to *Humanisme intégral* in 1936, and *Le crépuscule de la civilisation* in 1939<sup>5</sup>. As with his other friends, Maritain would often mention in his letters to Ghika the books he was working on, sometimes asking for Ghika's opinion (and Ghika did the same in return for his own writings). In 1922, Maritain dedicated his book *Antimoderne* to the Romanian prince, while a year later Ghika would publish in *La Documentation Catholique* an article defending Maritain's philosophical views, „Une conquête de la philosophie chrétienne. Jacques Maritain“. Not always an accommodating person, Maritain also triggered some vigorous intellectual opponents (hence Ghika's article), but, on the whole, the philosopher was much admired and sought after, especially by the younger generation.

As for Ghika, after becoming a priest of the Archdiocese of Paris in 1923, he was put in charge of *l'Église des étrangers*, the “Foreigners' Church”. Around the same time, he started a religious community in Auberive, in an old Benedictine abbey which had been lately used as a prison (the project, however, was short lived, causing him great material losses and deep spiritual pain). During his Paris years, Ghika was involved in organizing Eucharistic congresses, for which he travelled on four continents. Also, he helped in establishing several Church structures in missionary territories: he assisted a group of French Carmelites in starting a monastery in Japan; he invited the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul to start a community in his own country, Romania, and worked with the nuns to establish a central hospital in Bucharest (now “Spitalul de Endocrinologie C.I. Parhon”, still in function, though under State jurisdiction). Most of Ghika's published works date from this period: articles in *Revue universelle*, *Le Roseau d'or* (Maritain's magazine), *La Documentation Catholique*, *Études*, as well as several books: *Pensées pour la suite des jours*, *Les intermèdes de Talloires*, *La Messe byzantine dite de St-Jean Chrysostome*, *La visite des pauvres*, *L'Heure Sainte*, *La Présence de Dieu*, *La Liturgie du prochain* etc.<sup>6</sup> Tirelessly, Ghika gave conferences, provided spiritual counselling and helped numerous

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<sup>5</sup> For a complete list of Maritain's published writings, see Barré, *Les Mendiants* 623-629.

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed list of publications, see Băltăceanu *et al.*, *Profesor* 47-49.

people in need. Raised to the rank of Apostolic Protonotary, he was so active and travelled so much, that Pope Pius XI dubbed him “our apostolic vagabond”, a nickname that Ghika liked to confirm by saying, “My way is the railway.”

In the early days of September 1939, the outbreak of World War II would bring all this frenzy of activities to an abrupt stop. In a last note dated July 21, Maritain was apologizing to his friend because, “having been submerged by work” (nothing new here!), he had misplaced Ghika’s previous letter and thus had missed the opportunity of seeing him once more. We do not have Ghika’s misplaced letter, but apparently he was in Paris between two long trips and had suggested to meet one more time before each of them left for the summer. “[Our meeting] will have to remain for October, I hope” – answered Maritain in his note, as he was getting ready to depart, in just a few hours, for a well-deserved holiday.

But the October meeting never happened. By August 1939, Ghika would already be back in his homeland, working on yet another project: an attempt to improve the living quarters of the lepers’ colony near the Danube River, in the southern part of Romania. After the war started, this project stalled, but Ghika decided not to return to France, offering his assistance to the small but active Catholic Church in Romania. Soon, his presence would also be required by the rapidly growing number of Poles who, in 1940, took refuge in Romania, fleeing the Nazi invasion of their homeland.

Back in France, a wave of anti-Semitism made Maritain increasingly aware that “the little flock” – composed of his wife Raïssa, his sister-in-law Véra, and himself – were in life-threatening danger. By the end of 1939, the Maritains resolved to take refuge in the United States, where Jacques had been previously invited for various teaching assignments. On January 4, 1940, Jacques, Raïssa and Véra would leave Marseille by boat, headed for New York. A whole ocean and a raging war were now unfolding between the two friends.

#### **4. The last letter: six hundred words and twenty kinds of emotion**

The short note of July 21, 1939 is the last we have from Maritain. The epistolary contains just one more letter, sent by Ghika to his friend six years later, shortly after the end of WWII. Judging by its contents, the letter



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almost seems a delayed answer to that last note sent by Maritain in July 1939. In fact, it is quite probable that during the war years there had been little or no direct communication between the two friends.

This last item of the epistolary, not lengthy and without a known reply, is full of symbolic value. The scope of the letter, the many projects and feelings expressed in it, speak volumes both about its author *and* about its silent receiver. In six hundred words (see Appendix), Ghika literally “pours out” his soul, displaying an array of sentiments, and referring to a variety of past experiences and future projects. More than twenty states of mind and emotions can be identified in this brief text: uncertainty, happiness, “faithful affection and a growing communion of views”, sadness (for “the terrible years”), plea and support (“Resume the interrupted thread!”), admiration, hopeful trust, sense of deprivation and of being cut off, regret, nostalgia for Paris, modesty, honest contentment and gratefulness (“neither the trials nor the blessings have lacked”), a good knowledge of his own limits, along with a constant desire to work for the good of the souls; willingness to cooperate for the post-war reconstruction, a need for friendship, for sharing and exchanging opinions, undaunted interest for the cause of Catholicism (“testimonies of great importance”) and constant care for the spiritual life (“blessings ... for the duties of [your] state” – one of those puns Ghika was so fond of, as *state* referred both to Maritain’s religious status, and to his lay mission as an ambassador of his country).

Clearly it is a letter written “from the heart”, and we can almost see the anticipation with which Ghika sat at his desk and put his thoughts on paper. And here a word needs to be said about the role of correspondence by regular mail. Unlike today’s fast communications via text messages, e-mail, Instagram etc., letter writing – in those times – was an art, as well as an entertainment. It was, also, a way of reflecting on your own experiences, drawing wisdom from them, putting yourself in order, getting ready for new actions. In a certain sense, it was therapy – and this is exactly what Ghika does in his last known letter to Maritain. He is ready to put the ugly war years behind him, and start anew. He wants his friend Maritain to join him in this work of rebirth and reconstruction.

## 5. The first letter

Interestingly enough, the last known letter of the Ghika-Maritain correspondence is quite similar in tone to the *first letter* we have of the same epistolary. Written on December 8, 1920, Ghika's first preserved letter is an answer to an invite from his – back then – new friend Maritain. Apparently, the philosopher had invited Ghika to join him for a meeting in Meudon, Maritain's home. The occasion was, probably, one of the first sessions of an intellectual gathering, which later came to be known as *les Cercles d'études thomistes* – The Circle of Thomistic Studies. This activity would go on until 1939, that is, for the whole duration of Ghika and Maritain's Parisian collaboration.

In his letter of December 1920, Prince Ghika starts by apologizing for not being able to honour the invitation: ongoing, extensive travels will keep him out of France for the next two months. He then continues by describing his immediate plans – traveling to Louvain, giving a conference on Dante... Nevertheless, Ghika stresses that, as soon as he is back in Paris, he will be thrilled to talk to Maritain and his friends on a number of topics that are of mutual interest (*le plaisir de causer avec vous et vos amis de choses qui nous intéressent à bien des titres*).

One can already read between these lines the busy agenda of the two new friends. Written rather hastily, the letter ends with a post scriptum in which Ghika thanks Maritain for sending him some books. Among them, *Introduction à la philosophie* (a work published that year by the French philosopher with the Publishing House Téqui) particularly drew Ghika's attention and admiration.

What is interesting, in comparing the first and the last letter, is the unchanged tone of Ghika's "voice". In 1920, and in 1945 alike, Ghika seems to be exactly the same person – active, determined, informed, attentive to the needs of those around him and willing to help, if the cause is right. His motivation hasn't changed, either: it is, above all, an awareness that the world needs truth, God's truth, and that without it there is no way out. In this sense, Ghika's first and last letters display an exceptionally even spirit, amazing in its continuity. Maritain's last known letter, written in July 1939, is

consistent with Ghika's underlying attitude. Thus taken together, the three letters we have looked at so far summarize, in a way, the scope of the whole epistolary. Both correspondents are animated by mutual admiration and respect, and by a strong desire to work together for what they identify as the common good: seeking the truth, knowing God, promoting learning and helping those in need.

### **6. *Reprenez le fil interrompu* – “Resume the interrupted thread”**

The last letter was written in a very special context. In Romania, Ghika's homeland, the war had ended just two months before, with Germany's capitulation on May 9, 1945. In fact, after D-Day on June 6, 1944, one more turn of events had triggered a significant change in the course of the war: on August 23, 1944, Romania had shifted to the side of the Allies, depriving the German army of one of its main oil sources. The manoeuvre had been “supported” by the massive presence of Soviet troops in Romania, a presence that was to be continued after the war, eventually leading to the installation of a pro-Soviet, totalitarian regime in this country, in 1948. But, for the time being, we are in the summer of 1945, and Vladimir Ghika is full of hope. His plans aim high, and his energy is tireless, just the same as twenty-five years earlier, when Prince Ghika had first met Jacques Maritain, in the aftermath of World War I. Now, after yet another war, he is looking forward to rekindling that interrupted relationship, and to setting out with his old friend on new projects.

But is Maritain still the same, too? This is not sure. The joyous felicitations which his friend Ghika sends him – at the news of his appointment as French Ambassador to the Vatican – are not at all in tune with the mood of the philosopher. Repeatedly pressed by General de Gaulle<sup>7</sup>, Maritain had accepted the position under duress, and even before starting it he already abhorred it:

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<sup>7</sup> Barré, *Les Mendicants* 510-511.

I returned to New York on January 1, 1945 – would recount Maritain later –, having failed to make General de Gaulle and Georges Bidault, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, give up their project [...] to appoint me ambassador to the Vatican. The acceptance to which I had been morally compelled by their insistence, and by the feeling that I could not escape from a task asked of me on behalf of the country still at war, had reduced me to a kind of despair.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the war had affected Maritain deeply: his country, France, had been occupied, his beloved home in Meudon had been confiscated, and his writings, banned. The war had separated him from his family, his friends and his work; his mother had died during the war, while Maritain was on exile. Also, all the enmities that had surrounded him in pre-war France were still there, and had left him with a bitter taste. Unlike his Romanian friend, Maritain was probably less inclined toward – and more cautious about – embarking on new projects in his recently acquired position of diplomatic representative.

## 7. Worlds apart?

As stated above, the tone of the last letter leads us to think there was no direct communication between Ghika and Maritain during the war years. Yet, in the same letter Ghika tells his friend that “from a distance, but very close”, he’d followed his friend’s activity and felt “happy and proud” on his account.

While Ghika had not been completely cut off from what was happening on the other side of the Atlantic<sup>9</sup>, we do not know if the same had been true of Maritain in reverse. Had he been able to follow Ghika’s pursuits? It is not likely. After all, Ghika had spent the war years in his homeland, Romania, while Maritain had been an exile in America, having to start everything all over

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<sup>8</sup> Quotation translated from *Journal de Raïssa*, in Jacques et Raïssa Maritain, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. XV, Fribourg 1995, 433.

<sup>9</sup> It did take a couple of months, though, for Ghika to react to this information. Already in November 1944, General de Gaulle had appointed Maritain as French Ambassador. Maritain arrived in Rome at the beginning of April 1945 and his diplomatic mission officially started on May 10.

again. And France, Maritain's beloved country, had been under occupation. A lot of Maritain's time and energy had gone into supporting *la Resistance* remotely, through radio speeches and written texts. Maritain had also been busy organizing the French Diaspora and keeping alive its spirit in the US, through schools and conferences. Besides, news always travels more from the larger community towards the smaller; so, while it must have been relatively easy for Ghika – who was well connected – to hear about his friend in America, the opposite was less to be expected.

In any case, the war was now over – in Europe, at least. Maritain was back on the continent, based in Rome, a place which for the “apostolic vagabond” meant “just around the corner”. And although the war had torn their worlds apart, although the reconstruction needs were enormous, Ghika found the challenge invigorating: in the summer of 1945, the 72 year-old priest was ready to embark on a new beginning.

### **8. At home in Rome**

For Ghika, Rome was home in more than one way. First of all, like any good Romanian, he identified Rome with one of his two main historical roots. Second, Rome was the home of his faith, Catholicism, which he had embraced more than forty years before. Third, Rome was where he had conducted his theological studies, where he had worked along with his brother Dimitrie Ghika, a diplomat; it was the Holy City where he had become friends with three popes and some of the finest Catholic clergymen. When Ghika heard that Maritain had been appointed French Ambassador to Rome, he was, naturally, quite delighted. With his found-again friend there, he saw a world of opportunity opening up to him.

But, again, did Maritain's enthusiasm equal Ghika's? Ghika was in his element in Rome. He was a prince and, in a way, a diplomat, having been born to that kind of an environment. He was at ease in it, he knew how to skilfully use its strengths and was not abashed by its shortcomings<sup>10</sup>. Maritain, on the other hand, was more like a cross between a philosopher and a *desperado* – as

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<sup>10</sup> In spite of what a superficial reading may suggest, Ghika and Maritain were realists – in the best sense of Thomism, which takes into account both natural and supernatural realities.

one of his French biographers, Jean-Luc Barré, dubbed him. He did not want to go to Rome: he had accepted the job out of a sense of duty, pressed by his country's president, in a moment when France was still under occupation. Regarding Rome, he had not forgotten the sad memory of a failed intercession with Pope Benedict XV, in 1918, for the recognition of the Marian apparitions at La Salette<sup>11</sup>. And, before World War II, some of his books had barely avoided the *Index* – Vatican's list of forbidden books. His old time collaborator, Rev. Garrigou-Lagrange, had turned against him, and Cardinal Pacelli – the future Pope Pius XII – seemed to view his philosophical work with mixed feelings.

Moreover, in the domain of political thought Maritain had always been an independent, despite being claimed as a supporter by both the right and left ends of the spectrum. As a diplomatic representative refusing to take any parts, Maritain must have felt stifled in the bureaucratic environment of the French Embassy in Rome. His biographer, Jean-Luc Barré, tells us that Maritain hated all the social obligations and paperwork that came with the job; he attended to his diplomatic duties scrupulously, but often impatiently and without joy<sup>12</sup>. Yet, the French Embassy was the very same institution that Ghika was looking upon as a source of hope for his diplomatically underrepresented Romania. Which one of the two friends was right? And, with such a discrepancy of views, what might have been Maritain's answer to that letter of July 18, 1945 – addressed to him as French Ambassador, by his lifelong friend? Did he even send an answer? If there ever was one, it never reached us. Future research in the archives maybe will uncover it. Until then, we can only surmise.

## 9. The lost letter

From all we know about Maritain, it is very unlikely that he had left his friend's letter unanswered. In the past, when circumstances absolutely prevented him from writing in person, Raïssa or sometimes Vera made sure

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<sup>11</sup> In April 1918, Jacques and Raïssa Maritain had paid a visit to Pope Benedict XV in order to promote – unsuccessfully, though – the recognition of the La Salette apparitions (cf. Barré, *Les Mendicants* 194-197).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Barré, *Les Mendicants* 524.

to send a note to Ghika, explaining the situation. But this time we don't have a letter from any of them. Could it be that the estrangement, on Maritain's part, had been so huge as to make him leave the moving letter without an answer?

It is possible to believe that the two friends were now worlds apart. Ghika was tied to the many needs of his small, agrarian country – still a monarchy! In the meanwhile, Maritain had developed a successful career in the US and now, an internationally acclaimed figure, he was helping in the shaping of post-war France<sup>13</sup>. Yet, it is hard to think that Maritain would forget a friend he had always loved and admired. Besides, Romania was not altogether unknown in the US, where Maritain had spent the war years. The visit of Romania's Queen, Mary, to the United States, two decades before, in 1926, had made a long-lasting impression on American society. Later, during WWII, the kindness showed to the American prisoners of war, both by the Royal family and the Romanian population, had not gone unnoticed<sup>14</sup>. No, at the end of WWII Romania was not absent from the international public awareness.

However, it is true that after WWII Maritain became less and less interested in international politics. And after Raïssa's death in 1960, the philosopher would gradually withdraw from public life, refusing more and more visits and correspondence. Some biographical elements seem to suggest that this process had already begun before his appointment as ambassador in Rome, a position he deeply disliked.

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<sup>13</sup> Barré, *Les Mendians* 509-534.

<sup>14</sup> Just two years after the end of the war, in 1947, Romania would get an American Papal Nuncio: Archbishop Gerald Patrick O'Hara. Along with Prince Vladimir Ghika and the members of the Romanian royal family, O'Hara would be instrumental in distributing food supplies to the famished population, as part of the American Relief Aid. A couple of years later, confronted with rising totalitarianism, O'Hara would fight valiantly for the defense of religious freedom in a Communist ridden Romania. As a consequence, the American Nuncio would be expelled from the country in 1950 (less "fortunate", Prince Ghika would be arrested in 1952 and would die due to maltreatment in the Jilava prison, in 1954). The news of O'Hara expulsion in July 1950, at the hands of the newly installed regime, would make the front page of the American newspapers (cf. Liana Gehl's series of articles, *Punți peste oceane* (I-IV), in *Actualitatea creștină*, 9-12, 2014).

Moreover, the summer of 1945 – when Ghika’s letter arrived – was a very busy time for the Maritains. Raïssa’s journal contains an entry from August 10, 1945: “*Première journée à Rome...*” (the date is not far from the last letter’s date, July, 18; Ghika’s letter might have reached Rome around the same time). In a footnote to Raïssa’s entry, Jacques explains that he had gone to Naples the same day, to fetch his wife and his sister-in-law, Vera, and that in the months before he had been busy with all the accreditation process and various administrative tasks: not the best time to give heed to his friend’s invitation for a whole series of new projects. Nevertheless, given all we know about the French philosopher, one would be more inclined to believe that Maritain did send an answer to his friend Ghika, however short.

But Maritain’s answering letter to Ghika could have easily been lost in the turbulent post-war years. After the political changes in 1947/1948, the terror of the newly installed communist regime caused many people in Romania to burn or hide whatever papers might have proven compromising. In this context, Father Georges Schorung (a Lazarist priest who had served at the *Sacré Coeur* “French” Church in Bucharest) was instrumental in salvaging many of Ghika’s writings. Monsignor Ghika was also a priest of this parish until his arrest on November 18, 1952; subsequently, the parish was closed in 1957 and remained so until the fall of the communist regime in 1989. Expelled from Romania already in 1950, Father Schorung was able to return to Bucharest for a brief visit in the early ‘70s, when Romania’s international policy became more relaxed. On that occasion, assisted by a clerk of the French Embassy, Father Schorung managed to go into the rectory of the *Sacré Coeur* Church through a back window<sup>15</sup>. In one of the rooms, which had not been entered for almost 20 years, Father Schorung was still able to find several documents belonging to Monsignor Ghika, along with a significant amount of paper ashes. It is possible that Maritain’s answering letter had been among those ashes...<sup>16</sup> In

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<sup>15</sup> I am indebted for this information to Dr. Iulia Cojocariu, who is the head archivist of the Vladimir Ghika Archives of the Archbishopric of Bucharest.

<sup>16</sup> But even so, diplomatic protocol should have required Maritain to save a copy of his answer. Yet, no copy has been found – or, maybe nobody took the time to look for it. History may still have a surprise for us here.



any case, whether Maritain answered Ghika's last letter or not, the silence that followed is highly symbolical for the darkness which was soon to engulf Romania.

### 10. Contemplation *versus* "love in action"

What does Ghika's last letter teach us? Has it any significance for our days? May we read it as a living will? The Apostle James, in *his* well-known Letter, tells us that faith without works is dead. But, how about love? Is it possible to separate love from action? Blessed Vladimir Ghika's example seems to tell us that while it is possible to conceive of a merely intellectual faith, love – when real – will always spur to action.

Ghika was a true friend, and a great communicator. A versatile diplomat, he also knew how to identify concrete support for the specific needs of those around him. (A famous anecdote recounts how, having heard of a stubborn carpenter who was gravely ill of tuberculosis and yet refused to see a priest, Ghika went out of his way to find a broken chair, so that he might have a good reason to go visit the unrepentant carpenter; needless to say, a relationship developed between the two and eventually the carpenter made a good confession<sup>17</sup>). Ghika's manner, remarkably consistent throughout his whole life, may be compared to what modern theologians call "the inductive method": *see – judge – act*. The method was first used systematically at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Belgium, by Father Joseph Cardijn<sup>18</sup>, it received Papal support in Pope John XXIII's encyclical, *Mater et magistra* (1961), and in two of the main Vatican II documents: *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*. Amply referred to in a recent book about Pope Francis' theology<sup>19</sup>, the method consists of "a more existential approach" which starts from "the specifics of human experience" and proceeds to action, after having examined those "specifics" in light of the Word of God<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Jean Daujat, *Apostolul secolului XX – Monseniorul Ghika*, București 2017, 139.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. G. Whelan, Il metodo teologico di Papa Francesco, in: Michelina Tenace (edit.), *Dal chiodo alla chiave. La teologia fondamentale di Papa Francesco*, Vaticano 2017, 117-121.

<sup>19</sup> See note above, Michelina Tenace (edit.), *Dal chiodo alla chiave*.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Carotta, Ed.D, *Inductive and Deductive Methodology*, <https://cathdal.org/Inductive-and-Deductive.pdf>, 5 (accessed March 3, 2021).

It is not clear, at this point, whether Monsignor Ghika knew personally the promoter of the inductive method, Father Joseph Cardijn. It is, though, highly significant that in his last letter to Maritain, Ghika asks his friend to support him in his efforts by means of the “Young Christian Workers” – a youth movement established at the beginning of the century by Cardijn himself<sup>21</sup>. During the post-war years in Romania, by his “love-in-action” attitude, Ghika stands out as part of that Catholic stream which already anticipated the main lines of Vatican II.

But the inductive method, without the contemplative dimension, would remain just an automatic behaviour. Both Vladimir Ghika and Jacques Maritain knew it all too well. In their correspondence, they touch the topic of contemplation: they do not *discuss* it, but rather *refer* to it, matter-of-factly, in the same way one refers to the essentials of everyday life. More than apologists of the inductive method and/or contemplation, Ghika and Maritain are, rather, what St. Ignatius of Loyola called *contemplativi in actione*, „contemplatives in action”<sup>22</sup>. They know how to read the signs of the time by the light of the Gospel; they immerse themselves in God, and lovingly open their hearts to the needs of those around them.

Jacques Maritain and Blessed Ghika’s actions, guided by love, went much further than mere activism. In the last letter, Ghika describes his trials and successes in a simple, realistic way (“the apostolate is incessant and, thanks be to God, fruitful”; “neither trials nor blessings have been wanting”); his words are the clear proof of a contemplative soul, deeply rooted in God, and fundamentally oriented towards doing His will. The same letter provides another detail regarding the two friends’ profound convictions. Ghika writes to Maritain that he holds important information regarding the conversion of the highly influential French philosopher, Henri Bergson (Maritain’s teacher of Philosophy at Collège de France forty-five years before). The fact that Ghika mentions here an event which had happened several years before, at

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Joseph Cardijn: Challenge to Action*, by Eugene Langdale (edit.), Chicago IL, 1955, cited in Tenace (edit.), *Dal chiodo alla chiave*, 118.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Piero Coda, “*La Chiesa è il Vangelo*”. *Alle sorgenti della teologia di papa Francesco*, Vaticano 2017, 19-29.

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the beginning of World War II, tells us of his particularly committed nature. Like Maritain, Ghika deeply believed that love-in-action, supported by faith and grace, can influence the course of history. For this reason, he always strived to be present where he felt there was a soul in need of returning to God – as was Bergson’s –, and was especially concerned by the fate of those who were in leading – or teaching – positions.

*Contemplation in action* is not the only Ignatian trait shared by Vladimir Ghika and Maritain; spiritual discernment is another prominent dimension. All love, all action, and even all contemplation would be a waste – or even worse: an illusion – without a sane, holy discernment. Like Ignatius and all those who follow in his footsteps, with Blessed Ghika discerning the spirits is not just a matter of technique. It implies discerning the course to follow, the needs observed and the actions required. It is a way to unify the contemplation of God with service towards the brethren; it is full participation in the mission of Christ and of His bride, the Church. Ghika’s life – and his last letter to his friend Maritain is no exception – is an illustration of this principle. And it is revealing, but not at all surprising, that Ghika’s ideal, as well as his life principle and joy, find their matching description in Pope Francis’s encyclical *Evangelii gaudium*:

It is curious that God’s revelation tells us that the fullness of humanity and of history is realized in a city. We need to look at our cities with a contemplative gaze, a gaze of faith which sees God dwelling in their homes, in their streets and squares. God’s presence accompanies the sincere efforts of individuals and groups to find encouragement and meaning in their lives. (*Evangelii gaudium*, 71).

It is highly significant that a text written in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can apply so well to the life of somebody who died almost 70 years ago. Yet it is not surprising: after all, the universality of Catholicism spans not only space, but also time.

## 11. Conclusion

Ghika's last letter to Maritain is a typical letter of reconnection: after having been out of touch for six years (not five, as he says), Ghika is eager to resume his active cooperation with the French philosopher. In the span of time preceding the writing of this letter, multiple factors had put a certain distance between the two correspondents: first, various travels and assignments (see also Maritain's last letter, in July 21, 1939), then the war, the exile, the geographical boundaries. In this context, the last letter seems to have a two-fold aim: re-establish an old friendship *and* get help with the many post-war reconstruction needs which Ghika perceives in his country.

Monsignor Ghika's love for his country, his Church and his people resonates in every sentence of this last letter. His love is not a sentimental love; rather, it is an astute, pragmatic love, always on the lookout for solutions to identified problems. His way of dealing with the many needs around him, according to an inductive approach, anticipates the vision of Vatican II. As it transpires from the words of his last letter to Maritain, Ghika's love is, indeed, *love-in-action*, paralleled by an equally powerful *faith-in-action*. It is only too sad that, to his day, we do not know what Ghika's great friend answered him. History did not allow their friendship to go on.

## **Appendix**

### **THE FIRST AND THE LAST TWO LETTERS**

#### **Timeline**

The beginning of World War II in Europe is generally considered to be September 1, 1939, the day Germany invaded Poland. Two days later, on September 3, the United Kingdom and France declared war on Germany. On June 22, 1940, France signed the Armistice with Germany. The liberation of German-occupied France only began with D-Day on June 6, 1944.

Romania entered the war in November 1940, on Germany's side (as part of the Axis) and against the Soviet Union. On August 23, 1944, under the pressure of the advancing Soviet forces, the Romanian army would shift to the Allies' side, against Germany.

World War II ended in Europe on May 8/9, 1945, with Germany's capitulation. Worldwide, the war was over on August 14, 1945 ("Victory over Japan Day"), according to some historians, or on September 2, 1945 (formal surrender of Japan), according to others.

#### **Editorial note**

The Ghika and Maritain letters were edited and annotated by Luc Verly; a first selection was published in *Pro Memoria* 15-16, 2016-2017. The present English translation was done by the author of this article, including Verly's original footnotes.

**THE FIRST LETTER**<sup>23</sup>

Sachino<sup>24</sup>

by Bidart

(Basse-Pyrénées)

December 8, 1920

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Dear Sir

I receive, forwarded a little too late to acknowledge receipt in good time, your kind letter<sup>25</sup> of Nov[ember] 26. I am sorry that I cannot come see you on the date indicated, and that I have to postpone to a later date the pleasure of chatting with you and your friends about things which interest us in many ways.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> To be precise, the three letters below are to be identified as: the first known letter, the before-last known letter, and the last known letter. Many items of the Ghika-Maritain epistolary are still lost.

<sup>24</sup> Sachino (*Château le Petit-Biarritz*) was bought by Queen Nathalie of Serbia, a cousin of Vladimir Ghika who converted to Catholicism the same year as he did, in 1902. She had named her castle after her son Alexander (Sacha, Sachino). Driven from her throne, Nathalie went to live in the Convent of the Dames de Sion in Paris, while having retained a certain fortune.

<sup>25</sup> We do not have this letter, nor any of the letters addressed by Jacques Maritain to Vladimir Ghika during 1922.

<sup>26</sup> Most likely, Jacques Maritain had invited Vladimir Ghika to the first real meeting of the Thomist Studies Circles, which took place at the philosopher's house on Sunday December 5, 1920. To find out more on this Circle, please refer to Jacques Maritain's *Carnet de Notes*, which gives this brief information: "those who attended formed a varied group. (...) Some were already experts in Saint Thomas, others were just then doing their apprenticeship with him, others knew nothing or almost nothing. They weren't going to class; they weren't gathered in a college room to listen to a teacher's teaching (...). The friends (after a session that had lasted all afternoon) would leave just before dinner. A few remained, sometimes more, sometimes less, and dined with us. (...) The fundamental idea was to implement, based on our concrete concerns and on the needs of our minds, things which at the same time we knew to be diverse in essence, but between which we felt we must bring unity within ourselves – reason and faith, philosophy and theology, metaphysics, poetry, politics, and the great rush of knowledge and new questions triggered by modern culture." (Maritain, *Carnet de Notes*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1965, pp. 184-187). Vladimir Ghika would make his first appearance at the Circle on Sunday February 21, 1921. He also appears to have been there on April 29, May 8 and December 11 of that same year. But Jacques Maritain did not always mark down the attendance! (Maritain, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-194).

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I left Paris since November 9, and will not be able to reappear until around January 10; I will then make a short stop, on my way to Louvain where I am expected for a conference on Dante, scheduled for the 17th.<sup>27</sup> This first appearance will allow me to make contact and to establish with you some useful encounters for the current winter. I intend, on my return from Louvain, to stay in Paris until mid-spring. Therefore, if Providence favors my plans, this note is a “see you” between January 10 and 15, to begin with, and the prospect of frequent meetings between mid-January and mid-April, to finish.

Until then, please be assured of my very cordial sympathy and my fraternal goodwill for cooperation from your devoted in X<sup>to</sup>

V. I. Ghika

I found your shipment of books here on my return from Romania. I cannot begin to tell you how much I enjoyed the clarity, the method, and the nerve of your “Introduction to Philosophy”<sup>28</sup>. We will discuss this shortly, I hope in Paris. When is the sequel? will we have another volume this year?

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<sup>27</sup> At the *Institut Supérieur de Philosophie* de Louvain, of which Simon Deploige is the president. The program for the year also indicates that Jacques Maritain himself would give a lecture on Ernest Psichari (the program was published online by Persee: [http://www.persee.fr/doc/phlou\\_0776-555x\\_1920\\_num\\_22\\_88\\_2261](http://www.persee.fr/doc/phlou_0776-555x_1920_num_22_88_2261)).

<sup>28</sup> The first volume was published by Téqui in 1920. Jean Daujat testifies to the importance of this book: “This reading was the starting point of all the subsequent orientation of my thought, and that for all my life.” (Daujat, *Mémoires*, vol. 1 – 1906-1930, Téqui, Paris 2012, p. 370).

**THE BEFORE-LAST LETTER**

*Jacques Maritain to Vladimir Ghika (typed copy)*

Meudon, 10 rue du Parc, July 21, 1939

Dear Monsignor and Friend

Here I am, fully confused. I thought I had answered your kind letter of July 8, but then, putting away my papers before going on vacation, I found it among the “letters to be answered”. Forgive this carelessness. It must be said that lately I have been overwhelmed, submerged in work.

And we are leaving in a few hours for the Berry. I would have been so happy to see you, to chat with you after the Mass which you would have said in the chapel, “like in the good old days”. All of this will be for October, I hope.

In the meantime I assure you of our faithful and respectful thoughts, of the three of us<sup>29</sup>. Pray for us, and trust, dear recipient of *Antimoderne*’s dedication<sup>30</sup>, in my deep and devoted affection.

Jacques Maritain<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The three members of the Maritain household: Jacques, Raïssa and sister-in-law, Véra.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Maritain’s book, *Antimoderne* (1922), is actually dedicated “to Prince Vladimir Ghika”.

<sup>31</sup> This is the last letter we have from Jacques Maritain to Vladimir Ghika. In January 1940, accompanied by Raïssa and Véra, he left for America, planning to return to France in June. But the French defeat would block him on the other side of the Atlantic till the end of the war (cf. Thieulloy – 2005, 226-227). As for Ghika, in August 1939 he had gone to Romania with the idea of setting up a charitable work for the lepers, in the town of Isaccea (cf. Yvonne Estienne, *Une flamme dans le vitrail. Souvenirs sur Mgr Ghika*, Lyon 1963, 160). At that point, Ghika was thinking to go back to France in the fall (cf. Estienne, *Une flamme*, 251-252). Events also prevented him from returning to France. The two friends would never see each other again.



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**THE LAST LETTER**

*Vladimir Ghika to Jacques Maritain* (original manuscript)

[Recipient:]

His Excellence

Mr. Jacques Maritain

Ambassador of France to the Holy See

Bucharest, 2 Boulevard Dacia

July 18, 1945

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Dear Friend

I do not know if the Bucharest Nunciature was able to send you the congratulatory telegram that our friend Mouton<sup>32</sup> and I addressed to you for your appointment – quite felicitous – to the post of Ambassador of France in Rome<sup>33</sup>. In any case, I repeat these congratulations here, with the assurance of my faithful affection and of a communion of views which only grew stronger during the terrible years. From a distance, but very close, I was happy and proud of you through the ordeal<sup>34</sup>. And

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<sup>32</sup> Jean Mouton (1899-1995), then director of the French Institute in Bucharest. He had met Vladimir Ghika at the Maritains', who sometimes hosted him. He published a *Journal of Romania 1939-1946* (L'Age d'Homme, 1991), in which, *inter alia*, he speaks of Vladimir Ghika.

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Maritain writes in the *Journal de Raïssa*: "I returned to New York on January 1, 1945, having failed to make General de Gaulle and Georges Bidault, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, give up their project [...] to appoint me ambassador to the Vatican. The acceptance to which I had been morally compelled by their insistence, and by the feeling that I could not escape from a task asked of me on behalf of the country still at war, had reduced me to a kind of despair" (*Journal* - ?, 277).

<sup>34</sup> "During the war years, Maritain unhesitatingly championed democracies against totalitarianisms, all the more easily since he saw totalitarianism as the common enemy of both Christianity and democracy." (*cf.* Thieulloy – 2005, 245). For his part, Vladimir Ghika wrote to his brother before the war, on April 15, 1939: "... you may think you're dreaming when you hear all the nonsense decried by the shouts from across the Rhine or from 'across the Alps' (which, it seems, has more echo than it should in our poor country, despite everything). (...) The stray iron-guard type must realize that their course of action is not only criminal from the internal point of view, but [also pertaining] to high treason from the external point of view" (Vladimir Ghika Archives, Archbishopric of Bucharest).

neither my thoughts nor my prayers have ever abandoned you... Remember me, too, in your prayers. I do not lose hope of paying you a short visit in Rome one day, in the not too distant future (by plane only, of course). In the meantime, I ask you to defend, as has been the immutable tradition of the French Embassy to the Holy See, the well-understood interests of the Catholic faith in Romania. (When we had no diplomatic representation [of our own], the French Embassy was Romania's only representation to the Holy See, and even later [when we did have a diplomatic presence], given the exclusively political character of this representation, otherwise mediocre, it was at the French Embassy that we found our real support.) Resume the interrupted thread. There is so much to do, and to do it in a very large and beautiful way, French-way. Send us, as soon as you can, representatives of Catholic thought, the like of, and more numerous than [those you sent] to South America, and come to my support in what I am trying to do, here, with the French scouts, the J.O.C.<sup>35</sup>, the J.I.C.<sup>36</sup> – And then [send us] books, missals, magazines, which we have been deprived of for five years, to the great chagrin of souls. As far as I am concerned, the apostolate is incessant and, thanks God, fruitful. It goes on, through vicissitudes of all kinds, under all forms. But if, in the Vatican, they speak to you about me, as they did after the other war, in relation to a call to the vacant seat of Metropolitan of the Romanian United Church, or to the Latin Diocese of Jassy, [which is] also without a bishop, you can say that you know from me that I would decline this honour and this charge. I am not cut out for administration, representation, official functions and authority (other than moral authority). The only thing I wouldn't refuse in matters of dignity and responsibility (because it would add strength to everything I do for the good Lord) would be the Cardinalate. It would certainly be useful and felicitous to be the first cardinal in Romanian history, and I could maintain the 2 rites, which the episcopate, so far, has not implied. I will tell you some other time the story of my past 5 years in Romania, where neither trials nor blessings have been wanting. – I miss Paris! When will I be able to go back there too? – I would have so much to say to you, of general and particular interest as well... and among other things, retrospectively, the account of my last talks with Bergson (February-June 1939<sup>37</sup>) which allows me to add to [his] file testimonies and letters of the greatest importance for his conversion

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<sup>35</sup> *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* (Christian Working Youth).

<sup>36</sup> *Jeunesse Indépendante Chrétienne* (Independent Christian Youth).

<sup>37</sup> On this subject, see the letters from Bergson to Vladimir Ghika dated January 30, February 19, April 2, April 17 and July 13, 1939 (Vladimir Ghika Archives).

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and for the question of his baptism<sup>38</sup>.

My most affectionate blessing for you, your wife, and your “duties of state”.  
Yours fully dedicated in X<sup>to</sup>

V. I. Ghika

At the first opportunity, please present to the Holy Father – with the echo of prayers that I have never ceased from saying, for him, on my part, throughout the war, and which will continue, equally diligent, during the difficult post-war period – all the respect and affection that my heart could contain in the thirty years that I have had the joy of knowing him, and of receiving from him so many blessings and spiritual favours<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Ioan Miclea, in his article “Bergsonism și catolicism – Problema convertirii la catolicism a lui Bergson” (“Bergsonism and Catholicism – the issue of Bergson’s conversion to Catholicism”), published in *Cultura creștină*, n. 9-12 of September 1944, gives an extract from a letter that Vladimir Ghika wrote to Father Miclea about Bergson: “In 1939, he [Bergson] published an open letter, during the inauguration of the commemorative plaque placed on the house of Péguy, in which he wrote two crucial things: at first he professed faith in a personal and transcendent God (therefore liberated from the previous Bergsonian system), and, speaking of Péguy’s return to faith, he declared that he could not fail to turn to the One who took upon himself, in order to redeem them, all the sins and sufferings of the world – this letter was the occasion for a letter which I addressed to him, and which was the beginning of our relationship. This relationship mainly consisted (apart from the prayers that I made both before and after that) in an exchange of letters relating to the meetings that we had together, quite important and long meetings, followed by some unequivocal confessions on his part. During our last meeting (in June 1939, it seems to me) we only talked about the need for baptism, which appeared to him in a new light, after I showed him that it could not be a matter of a baptism of desire, in his case, but of a desire for baptism, which was not the same thing. He acknowledged this, in deep emotion and spiritual shock” (pp. 477-478). Ioan Miclea adds that the two men had even established the date for the baptism, and that Vladimir Ghika looked in vain for Henri Bergson, who was lost in the May 1940 debacle... which is not likely, as Vladimir Ghika had been in Romania for almost a year by then. This “conversion” is confirmed, however, by Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, who visited Bergson shortly before his death. Bergson said to her at one point: “You are *part* of Christianity. Well! I *came* here...” His will confirms it, also: “My reflections have brought me closer and closer to Catholicism, in which I see the complete fulfillment of Judaism. I would have converted, had I not seen for years in the making (...) the tremendous wave of anti-Semitism that was to sweep the world. I wanted to remain among those who were going to be persecuted on the morrow” (*cf.* Ancelet-Hustache – 1955).

<sup>39</sup> In March 1939, Vladimir Ghika had written to Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli, 1876-1958) to congratulate him on his election. He recounts this episode in a letter to his sister-in-law, Elisabeth Ghika: “Against the protocol rules, I have sent, directly to the Holy Father, a dispatch, assuring

**The last letter – a quick overview of topics and emotions**

<b>Topics</b>	<b>Attitude, feelings</b>
Bucharest Nunciature, lost telegram	uncertainty
Maritain's appointment as Ambassador of France in Rome	happiness ("felicitous", "congratulations")
assurance of continued friendship, constant prayer and support	"faithful affection and a growing community of views"
war-time	"terrible years"
Maritain's activity in exile	"happy and proud of you through the ordeal"
Ghika's possible visit to Rome in the near future	hopeful, ready for action
Romania's need of a reliable representative by the Holy See	trust that the French diplomats will continue to provide their support
Maritain as continuator of a long tradition of diplomatic representation on behalf of Romania	encouraging ("Resume the interrupted thread")
enormous needs of the post-war reconstruction	admiration for the French spirit
Ghika's activity in Romania	great needs, plea for help
demand for Catholic intellectuals and expertise ("French scouts, the J.O.C., the J.I.C.")	specific, direct request, hopeful trust in the resourcefulness of the French
books, missals, magazines	sense of deprivation and of being cut off
"chagrin of souls"	sadness
personal apostolate during the five years of war; varied and fruitful work,	modest, but pleased and grateful: "neither the trials nor the blessings"

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him of my prayers. He had an answer sent to me, against all odds, within 24 hours, thanking me and sending me his blessing. Not knowing my address, he had it mailed with this wording: "Vladimir Ghika – Paris" – it arrived just as well, without delay, thanks to the ingenuity of the PTT" (Vladimir Ghika Archives).

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<b>Topics</b>	<b>Attitude, feelings</b>
in spite of difficulties	have lacked”
Ghika’s possible appointment to the local hierarchy	realistic refusal (he knows he’s not good at)
possibly, the Cardinalate	willing, “for the good of the souls”
interested in the advancement of both Catholic rites, Latin and Byzantine	eager to cooperate (“useful and felicitous”)
various things of general and particular interest	a need to share, exchange opinions
Paris	nostalgia
Bergson’s conversion to Catholicism	endeavour for the advancement of the Kingdom of God: “testimonies of great importance”
difficult task of the after-the-war reconstruction	prayerful concern
ending formula: same as usual	unchanged friendship
blessings to Jacques and Raïssa	no mention of Véra, he might have been afraid she was not alive any more
“duties of the state”	affectionate hint to the past relations of spiritual direction
Post scriptum: Holy Father, Pope Pius XII	long-time respect and affection, joy and gratitude, a feeling of being blessed and favoured

