

Meet Jérémie Regard

From:

Jacques Lusseyran. *Le monde commence aujourd'hui*. (Paris 1959). Gallimard 2016.

Translation and summary by

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The author Jacques Lusseyran (from Paris) was arrested in 1943 by the Gestapo and incarcerated with 2000 French prisoners in Buchenwald/Germany. Jérémie Regard was a French blacksmith arrested in 1944 and brought to the same concentration camp where Lusseyran got to know him. When the camp in 1945 was liberated there were only 30 survivors, Jacques Lusseyran being one of them. He moved on to work as author, lecturer and professor in the United States.

"In the middle of block 57 Jérémie found joy. He found it in times of day when we all were only terrified ... What kind of joy was this? I would like to share a few observations: The joy to be alive, in this moment, in the next moment ... It was the joy to discover that joy exists, that it is in us, as life is, that joy is *unconditional* and that no condition - even the worst - can ever destroy joy."

Jérémie Regard is a tower of serenity, calm and comfort to the 1000 people who are squeezed into a shack for 400. People even form a small aisle when he passes

through speaking words of encouragement. The blind author senses all this and can write about it. He feels his way into the mystery of Jérémie:

"Wherever he appeared, one could breathe. The breath of Life touched my face. It was probably not a miracle, but a certain effect only from him. When Jérémie wandered through the block we could breathe. In my memory I can follow the light and pure way he took through the crowd. At that time I understood not who he was, but I have seen it. And this image is a light in me like a light-tower. I didn't know who he was, because he didn't talk about it: He belonged to the Christian Science movement. He had even been to the US to meet with other brothers and sisters in his faith, a truly remarkable event for a blacksmith from Northern France; it caught my attention but didn't help me much to learn more. It only increased the mystery; that was all. Jérémie meant something, without his history."

The book dedicates an entire chapter to Jérémie Regard. The author being a seeker, a thinker, and someone who finds something very special, asks himself many times where the joy came from that Jérémie shared with the others daily, the joy right in the middle of block 57, where everyone was scared. One explanation that the author comes up with is, that he observes that Jérémie doesn't dream or transform his fear into wishful thinking as everyone else does - shutting their eyes to the situation in front of them: How great it would be to be free, how wonderful it would be to be somewhere else. Daydreaming as a means of escape. Jérémie didn't daydream. He lived right in the now and compared this present to any other „normal“ experience people would have had outside the camp. How could he be so serene? How did Jérémie do that?

„What I call supernatural, was *the complete breakaway from the ordinary*, which he had committed. He had distanced himself completely from the habitual custom after which we call any mischief „fate“ or „suffering“, from the ordinary urge to hate, to call for revenge or - a lesser but still undisputable form of hate - to protest, in the habitual egocentric frenzy, in which we believe to be innocent every time we suffer. He had escaped from the net of inevitable reflexes, and it is only this fact - not good health, not even perfect health, if even existing - which can explain his person. He had reached his

center and had found there the supernatural or - if you dislike that word - what's essential, what is not depending upon circumstances, what exists at every time and in every place, in pain and in joy. *He had found the fountain of Life.* At the same time, he was enveloped in a cloak of transparency and purity. I have used the word „supernatural”, because it seemed to me that Jérémie's acting was a religious act: The discovery that God is here, and that to find Him is possible. That was „the good news“ that Jérémie proclaimed in his modest way."

The author continues to speak about the place Jérémie has in his memory: „When I speak about him, I must speak about Buchenwald. But don't be fooled: *Jérémie was never there.* I have encountered him in person, yes, he had tattooed into his arm a number for a prisoner, yes, and others remember him as we'll. But he was not there is in this exclusive, individual way, which we connect with the sentence „he was in Buchenwald “. The experience of the concentration camp was to him something like a random event: It couldn't touch his center." It is a special grace of God that Jérémie Regard passed on a few days before he was scheduled to leave for the gas chamber. The author finishes his praise for Jérémie Regard, who changed his life for the better and helped him survive:

„The whole secret and the whole power of those men, who serve another cause other than their own provisory existence, lies in the fact that you cannot avoid them."

In an essay “Christ at Buchenwald” Lusseyran writes later: “We would all gain a lot by putting memory in quarantine ... 'the stingy, encumbering memory which makes us believe in this unreality, this myth, the past.'”