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Presenting Fr Castellani to the American public

Because he’s quite unknown to the English-speaking public, I would very much like to introduce Fr Leonardo Castellani, an Argentine Jesuit born at the turn of the 19th century (1899) who died in Buenos Aires, in 1981.

Why? Why do I venture to write about this rather obscure character seeing that English-speaking Christians have so many Christian classic authors to read, such as Newman, Benson, Belloc, Chesterton, Lewis and more recent ones (perhaps in the same league) such as Peter Kreeft, Thomas Howard or Anthony Esolen? Well, the short and the long of it is because this unknown Argentine has written about one or two things that I’ve never seen considered by those authors—nor, for that matter, by anyone else. Castellani is an original (a word, by the way, that evokes a going back to one’s origins.) Of course, he followed suit—in all his works you can always detect *de la suite dans les idées*, a certain harmony with every Christian in history who was willing to fight for the Church, be it St Augustine or Ronald Knox. Castellani was fiercely in love with truth and from there stemmed his unbending loyalty to Tradition. But perhaps more importantly for us, his original insights seem to be very relevant to our times.

“How come?”, one could easily ask. Well, let’s take a brief look into his life.

A quite prolific author (he authored more than 1000 journalistic articles and about 50 books, never translated into English), Castellani has had a very important influence on Argentine Catholics concerned with the Church and its stand in the modern world, mainly owing to his, as I say, very orthodox views aired in his original style.

During the ‘30’s, Castellani studied as a Jesuit in Europe, first Theology in Rome (at the Gregoriana where he was under Cardinal Billot’s tutorship), moving later to Paris where he obtained a “Petit Doctorat” in Psychology: his resulting thesis is a very interesting piece on the cathartic effect of St. Ignatius's Exercises (1932) very much pondered then by Jacques Maritain, among others (a reference to Castellani can be found in the second edition of “Art and Scholasticsm” where he discusses the relation between art and morals.) In 1935 he came back to Argentina where he taught and wrote some very controversial articles on all sorts of subjects, but mainly on politics, literature, sociology, philosophy, psychology and theology. His main thesis was that the Jesuits specifically but also the Church in general were in a very poor intellectual state that would eventually undermine its stand against the modern world. *Par contre*, Castellani was well-read and drew freely on Aquinas, Augustine, Bossuet, Lacunza, Chesterton, Belloc, and C.S. Lewis among other authors. His great love was literature, especially French and British. He also knew the American great authors such as Walt Whitman, Marc Twain, T.S. Eliot, and Emerson. At about forty he was quite fluent in English, French, Italian, and German and could read (and write!) in Greek, Latin and, of course, Spanish. He knew a bit of Hebrew, and a little Portuguese too. In his later years he dipped into Danish to understand Kierkegaard better (the result is one of his best books.)

Notwithstanding such impressive credentials and impeccable orthodoxy—in those days a priest in Buenos Aires with such widespread knowledge was quite unheard of—his writings got him into trouble with his Superiors (in some part due to ignorance, in some part out of pure envy—when not a mix of those two), being eventually expelled from the Society in 1949 without due process or formal prosecution. As a result, he was suspended *a divinis*. He had his full priesthood returned to him only twenty years afterwards thanks to an energetic papal nuncio in Buenos Aires, who took the matter into his hands. All the same, the restitution was made silently, without any explanation for what had happened, in a *non mi ricordo*, “let bygones be bygones” sort of way.

From 1949 onwards for the rest of his life he consecrated himself to write religious and literary articles in magazines and newspapers—mainly to keep body and soul together. In a sort of Léon Bloy way he lived in extreme poverty (mostly depending on his friends) until he died in 1981.

This is no place to go into much detail about the circumstances that led to his expulsion, but suffice it to say that without a proper prosecution he never had a chance of a proper defence. And that the real reasons for him being treated in this way were connected to his criticisms of the state of the Society and Church at large—a state of things that nobody wanted to hear about and that anticipated much woe for the future of the Church.

Nothing comes from nothing

He was right thirty years before Vatican II, and because of this, during those thirty years was treated as a madman or a fool. But nothing changed for him afterwards; most of the progressive clerics were the old conservatives now enthusiastically backing the new horse. In any case, Castellani has been systematically ignored through and through.

I sometimes like to think that Castellani’s enemies in the (R. C.) Church were right. Let me explain myself. He contended that the Church was a boat in bad condition, it was in heavy need of repair, it leaked, the navigation was erratic and therefore he argued that it should, so to speak, stop for a while and consider carefully the maps, decide on the right course, repair the ship and then, only then, sail on once again. In those days, such criticisms were not favorably received. As Newman himself had discovered so painfully half a century before, Castellani found the same sort of adversaries à la Ward, Faber, Manning and Talbot. The Church was right. The World was wrong. Period. No amount of arguing would make these people change their minds. Instead of discussing modern issues these people simply wanted them suppressed. They thought this was a solid way of proceeding and during that period between both Vatican’s Councils they seemed to be quite right. They stated dogmatically and hated free discussion. They studied a bit, but somewhat superficially. Clericalism was rampant. A certain puritanism had made its way into morals—any Newman reader would know what I’m referring to. Both of them, Newman and Castellani, said it a hundred times in different ways, to no avail: one day the situation would explode.

Now, of course, we can easily see why these authors are particularly relevant to our times (and we’ll not lose our time with the contemporary fad that wants Newman as a forerunner of Vatican II, I ask you). But not so, their work is tremendously enlightening in so far as they denounce all sorts of bad doings in the Church *before* Vatican II which explain most of the *débacle* which followed... (nothing comes from nothing).

Again, he was not quite alone in seeing this sort of thing (I’ve just mentioned Newman, but we can also find such reservations in other twentieth-century brilliant scholars, the likes of Fr Louis Bouyer, Albert Frank-Duquesne, Romano Amerio, Michael Davis, Fr R. L. Bruckberger, among others).

A forgotten dogma

However, to my mind what is really exceptional in Castellani’s views is that, being as he was such a good Biblical scholar (and lover of Holy Scripture) he easily identified in the Roman Catholic Church a whole trend of thought that drifted away from one of the main dogmas (on the whole in Reformed Churches, the story runs differently).

Here’s how he puts it in one of his books:

Jesus Christ is coming back, and his doing so is one of the dogmas of our faith.

It is one of the more important dogmas that we find wedged between the fourteen articles of faith that we recite every day in the Credo and that we intone when we assist to a solemn Mass. *“Et iterum venturus est cum gloria judicare vivos et mortuos”.*

Also, it is a somewhat forgotten one. A splendid dogma, which few people reflect upon.

Its translation runs like this: this world will not evolve indefinitely, nor will it end by chance, as if it were to collide with a fallen star, nor will it end by natural evolution of its elementary forces or cosmic entropy as physics like to say. Instead, it will end by a direct intervention from its Creator. It will not die from a natural death, but by a violent one; or to put it better—since He is a God of life and not of death, from a miraculous death**.**

But things were worse than that. Not only had the modern world (and good portions of the Church) forgotten this. They forgot to even consider the question:

Our world’s specific mental disease is to think that Christ will never come back; or, at the very least, to not even consider His coming.

Consequently, the modern world doesn’t understand what’s happening to it. They say Christianity has failed. Intent on saving humanity, they invent fanatical as well as atrocious systems. They are about to beget a new religion. They want to build another Babel tower that will reach unto heaven. They want to win back Paradise with their own forces.

As Hilaire Belloc described it, today’s heresy doesn’t explicitly deny any one single Christian dogma, it only falsifies them all.

It manifestly denies Christ’s Second Coming and with that it denies his Regnancy, his Messiahship, and his Divinity. In short, it denies the whole divine process of history. And in denying Christ’s Divinity it denies God Himself.

This is radical atheism dressed up with religious clothes.

As anyone can easily see, this characterizes nearly every trend in our world and in the Church in our times. Think about Vatican II. Remember John XXIII's admonition against the “prophets of doom” on occasion of its formal inauguration? Think about John Paul II (or even Benedict XVI if you feel up to it). To my knowledge they have never referred to the Second Coming. And it’s not only a most important dogma of our Faith. It has been prophesied that in the last days precisely that dogma would be forgotten. With what consequences?

Consider this:

This religion has no name yet, and when it will, its name will not be its own. All Christians who do not believe in Christ’s Second Coming will yield to it. And the New Religion will make them believe in the Other one who will come before. For “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive” (Jo. V:43).

The first Pope wrote about this: “Know this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts. And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? (2 Petr. III:3-4).

All is not gold that glitters

Of course, Castellani was perceptive enough to detect some tares among the “prophets of doom” too. These days, lots of people seem to guess that some of the events taking place in the world (say 9/11, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, bird flu, etc...) anticipate terrible things for the future. But they have forgotten the Bible; they have lost their compass.

Our world is anxious for prophecy. Because of the disasters and threats of these catastrophic times it is only natural to want to know what’s next. He who doesn’t know where he’s going cannot take a single step. Everybody is wailing, where is the world going?

False prophecies are addressed to this hunger. So it is necessary to let the true prophecies be known, for it is for that purpose that they were given to us.

False prophecies? Where are the true ones? Shouldn’t the Church be clear about this? Is there any other topic more important than this one? Then why doesn’t Vatican II or any of the Popes since say a word about the four last things? Shouldn’t the Church be frank and outspoken on these issues (as she was in other, better, times?) All the more because,

Some Catholics without much theology recklessly sift through private prophecies from the dangerous field of pious books.

We must, then, go back to the great primordial prophecy, Christ’s eschatological prophecy, Saint Paul’s prophecies and Saint John’s Book of Revelations.

This world will end. The end will be preceded by a great apostasy and a great affliction. After that, Christ’s Second Coming will take place, and of his Kingdom there shall be no end.

These prophecies are found firstly in what is known as our Lord’s eschatological sermon.

Anyone can find them in the synoptics. Here they are, chapter and verse: Luke, XVII:20, Mathew XXIV, 23 and Marc XIII:21.

Strong words

So much talk about this and that! When one reads all those Church documents about, I don’t know, ecumenism, altar girls, third world debt, climate change, housing, and general welfare it seems that Catholics have forgotten Jesus Christ’s admonitions and that even traditionalists have got entangled in this or that or some other secondary issue. I don’t say that we don’t need to address the question of women-priestesses or abortion or whatever. Everyone has to battle on every issue he can as well as he may. But Castellani reminds us that to forget Jesus’ *ipssisima verba* would render all those battles futile or worse - because even the Antichrist could appear in a traditionalist guise (after all, he seems to be a somewhat serious guy).

Did I say *ipsissima verba*? Yes, *ipsissima verba Iesu.*

In their simple brevity, Christ’s words are far more fearsome than the fulgurant visions of the Book of Revelations, with its terrific scenes of blood, fire, and ruins. Christ simply says that there shall be a great tribulation, one without precedent, such as has not been seen since the beginning of the world until this time, nor ever shall be—and we have seen more than one! And that except those days should be shortened, no flesh would be saved and that if it were possible, even the elect would perish.

The terrible wars, plagues, and earthquakes that must come to pass are but the beginning of sorrows. The Sorrow itself will be even worse. Because, having ripened, the world’s iniquity will rise in all its artlessness and will draw from all its previous rehearsals, this time directed by Satan in person, who will be cast unto the earth having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. Woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! Woe unto them that remain to be riddled and winnowed out by Satan himself in the last trial!

Ancestral voices prophesying war!

As Coleridge puts it, we militant Christians cannot forget that we live in the middle of a war, and that this is no time for jejune talk. The voices are ancestral, all right. But the war is ongoing.

The two antagonic forces that battle in the world since the Fall will reach their maximum tension in their effort to prevail. The saints will be overcome and defeated everywhere. Apostasy will cover the world like the Flood. Iniquity and lies will have a free hand. The most powerful political governance ever seen will not only slaughter Religion with fire and sword, but will dress up as a false religion too. And the few remaining faithful will seem to lose their poise when, separated from the Obstacle, the Son of Perdition makes his appearance; him in which God has no part and that Christ not even deigned to name: Antichrist.... the Other one.

Here, then, is One who doesn’t like to mince words. This doesn’t mean, of course, as maybe our liberal friends would like to think, that we don’t have any Hope. Far from it. But facing as we do, dire facts, we need strong words and we can do without all the wishy-washy, insipid twaddle we have to listen to from all those so very politically-correct “pastoral agents”, priests, Bishops, Cardinals, and Popes that we have suffered for so many decades!

And the only words strong enough to face such troublesome times as those we have to live through are the Lord’s words, that are, as St Paul reminds us, “sharper than any two-edged sword”:

To talk about a “tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world” is to say a lot. It means that the Christians of those times will suffer as no one ever suffered before; not even like Job, nor Oedipus, nor Hamlet; not like Thomas Moore, Edmund Campion or Saint John of the Cross. And those Christians have already passed away; it is our turn now, or someone near us, to suffer so. Let us welcome such afflictions as long as we see Christ’s Coming once again!

Hope against hope

No, we Christians have only Hope to sustain us. That’s the real difference with our enlightened and progressive friends, that’s what differentiates the wheat from the tares.

The awesome visions of the Seer of Patmos—that Renan calls “deliriums of terror”—plus Christ’s own words, are stronger in their steely transparency than those used by his disciples and should induce to panic and despair were they not compensated by the most sweet promises.

As the greatest tribulation in its short span of years conveys an inordinate terror, in the same way, the conditional “were it possible” expresses the most loving promise. “Were it possible, the very elect would be deceived”, says Christ.

It is not possible, then, for the elect to fall. An Angel seals their foreheads and numbers them. God commands that the great plagues be suspended until everyone is sealed. Out of love for them, God shortens the persecution. Antichrist shall only reign for half a week of years (42 months, 1.260 days). The martyrs shall all be avenged. The ungodly shall suffer countless plagues. Two great saints will defend Christ having in hand prodigious powers. And when they fall, Christ will summon them and they will revive.

Back to Buenos Aires

Anyway, enough is enough. I’m writing this introduction at home, in a small suburban town near Buenos Aires, on a cold dark evening. There’s a photograph of Father Castellani looking down at me while I pound on these computer keys and fight with my dictionaries (only one “n”, right?) Just now a daughter of mine has asked me if two men can be married. She’s only nine; I wish she had never even heard about these things, not yet at any rate.

And I’m a bit afraid, all right. I readily admit it. An Argentine Bishop has been recently caught with a hidden camera: he was having sex with a taxi boy (and, surprise, surprise, was for the very first time dressed in his cassock. Can you believe that?). But no, things aren’t easy for anyone anywhere. I’ll be warily on the look out for new disasters on my T.V. tonight while I think about my children’s future once again. Yup. There's no denying it; I’m a bit afraid all right.

But, at the same time, I can’t quite wipe out a smile that keeps coming to my face remembering all those astringent truths Castellani insisted on reminding us.

After all, we Christians think it is incumbent on us to remember them, and that anyone who thinks of unlearning and forgetting them is in the wrong, shall I say, business.

*Bella Vista, Buenos Aires, Argentina*

**An apology from yours truly**

Oh that my English were better!

Castellani's brilliant Spanish deserved the best translation possible, but the fact remains that until now no one with English as his first language has taken it up: to render Castellani in English, in very good English.

So here's my effort for what it's worth.

It has been done hoping that our author's sterling language (and perspectives) would shine through my meagre efforts.

In any case, bear with me, give it a try.

It may be worth it.

Sebastian Randle

In 1999, eighteen years after his death, thanks to Fr Carlos Biestro and Alejandro Bilyk’s efforts, a short book by Castellani saw the light of print for the first time (nearly half a century after it had been written, and which now, believe it or not, is out of print). A friend of mine suggested that I translate it, because, he said, it would be especially relevant for American readers. As you will see, it’s a real *tour de force* on a well-known but little talked about subject. And its relevancy for American readers? Well, you tell me.

**CHRIST AND THE PHARISEES**

Prologue

*Well known things to everyone,*

*and yet, left unsung.*

(José Hernández, “Martín Fierro”)

The whole life of Jesus of Nazareth as a man can be summed up in one standard expression: "He was the Messiah and he fought the Pharisees"—or perhaps even more briefly: "He fought the Pharisees".

That was the work Christ personally assigned to himself: his campaign.

All the lives of Christ that we know of follow other formulae: "He was the Son of God, he preached the Kingdom of God and confirmed his preaching with miracles and prophecies...". Very well, but what about his death? These biographies cut out his death, his single most important deed. They are lives written in a more apologetics like vein, and less so in a biographical one: Louis Veuillot, Grandmaison, Ricciotti, Lebreton, Papini, Mauriac...

In this manner, the tragedy of Christ's life remains hidden. The life of Christ was no idyll, it is not a romantic story nor an elegy, but one that played out dramatically: there is no tragedy without an antagonist. Christ's antagonist, and to all appearences a victorious one, was Pharisaism.

Without Pharisaism Christ's life would have been entirely different, not to mention the history of the whole world. His Church would not have been what it is today, and the universe would have followed another track, one entirely unimaginable for us, with Israel leading the People of God instead of what really happened to those who killed God and are now scattered all over the world.

Without Pharisaism, Christ would not have died on the Cross; but then, without Pharisaism humanity wouldn't be the Fallen Race it is, and religion itself wouldn't be a religion either. Pharisaism is the worm of religion; and after the First Man fell, it is an unavoidable one, for in real life, as things stand, there is no fruit without its worm nor any institution without its own specific corruption.

It is religious pride: an exceedingly subtle and perilous corruption of the greatest of all truths, that religious values are the highest. Yet at the very moment we attribute them to ourselves, we lose them; at the very moment we take to ourselves what belongs to God, they no longer belong to anyone—that is to say, unless they fall to the devil. As soon as one is conscious of it, the look of piety becomes a grimace. The saints' great doings are unselfconscious, in other words, authentic, or, to put it another way, divine: saints "suffer God" and in a certain sense do their work as divine automatons, just like people in love; without "self-awareness" as they say nowadays.

But get me right: I'm not saying they do these things without freedom, unconsciously and without premeditation; I'm simply establishing the "primacy of the object", which in the religious realm is a "transcendental object"—the primacy of contemplation over practice, of the intelect over the will—which nowadays some would call the preeminence of the Image.

The Pharisee is the man of practice and of will, in other words, a specialist in jesuitry and a Great Observant, a most law-abiding person.

There are countless "external" portraits of the Pharisee. You'll find the best one in the Gospels. In those books the Pharisee is not only depicted by Christ but you can also see him at work, how he acts against Christ. The underground work that culminates in the biggest crime of all shows up in sinkholes along the way, like the boils of a rash, leaving traces here and there of the disease, the psychological trend, though not revealing itself entirely, for the soul of a Pharisee is a dark and dismal thing. A Pharisee cannot write his own self-portrait.

It hasn't been done, and no one can. Molière's Tartuffe is a poor wretch, a fool, a vulgar and a base rascal who wears a transparent mask of piety. But your true Pharisee wears no mask; he himself is nothing else than a big mask. His nature has become a mask, he lies naturally since he has started by lying to himself. His faked sanctity amalgamates with the egoist he is; these two ingredients melt to produce a dreadful poison that knows no antidote. Glycerin plus nitric acid equals dynamite.

It was Jesus of Nazareth’s fate to clash with Pharisaism; and once it began, a fight to death inevitably followed. This drama played out under strict determined rules as any good tragedy must. It was doomed for one that had assigned himself the mission of going to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" that he would have to confront those who were the cause of the ruin of Israel, that is to say the false shepherds, the wolves disguised as shepherds, in sheep's clothing.

Humanity has never witnessed a more acute conflict, nor one more dangerous and tragic than this one: living religion must live inside mummified religion without drying up, without giving up what it really is, like living sap flowing inside a dead trunk. That was Christ's difficult and delicate work.

The chair of Moses continues to be the chair of Moses. One must follow the words of those seated there without doing what they themselves do; and say a lot of other things that they leave unsaid, and must me said—words that make them jump like snakes: give "witness unto the truth". This is what has to be done, not forgetting the other thing.

This thorny work rips open Jesus' heart, making visible its interior. How can we possibly be devout lovers of the Sacred Heart without knowing it? And how could we possibly know it without entering it? These days one can find heartless people who celebrate his Sacred Heart.

So then, the invisible thread that links every one of Jesus' acts, defines his character and uncovers his heart, is none other than his tremendous confrontation with these corruptors of religion. The religious conflict blows up as soon as Christ makes his first move preaching in public as a prophet in Cana of Galilee. The religious opportunists say: "What's this?", "What is This Man doing?" They were already on the alert after hearing John the Baptist's vociferous preaching. This One had just been authorized and proclaimed by the Other One.

It's symptomatic that the rough penitent from Makeron was put to death by a lustful man, while Christ was brought to his by puritans. As Christ himself noted, Pharisaism is a hundred times worse than other vices. Pharisaism is a spiritual vice, in other words, a diabolical one, for the corruptions of the spirit are worse than those of the flesh. It is a compendium of all the spiritual vices: avarice, ambition, conceit, pride, wilful blindness, ruthlessness, cruelty; that has diabolically emptied the inside of the three theological virtues, and thus constitutes the "sin against the Holy Spirit": "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do."

The deviations of the flesh are corruptions; but the deviations of the spirit are perversions. The Great Incest is to copulate with oneself, to make oneself God. That's what the devil did in the beginning, the Great Homicide.

Why do we say "sin against the Holy Spirit"? Because the Spirit is the Love that unites the Father and the Son, the Love that takes a man out of himself and brings him to God. Thus, Pharisaism is a sin without cure, a love that twists all actions and even twists that which was made to untwist the twisted. It distorts "il Primo Amore", the First Love as Dante called it.

Since the Pharisee is divine in his own eye, all his deeds are also seen as divine. There is no point sharp enough to pierce this coat of mail, these scales more serried than Behemoth's—not even the very Word of God, that two-edged sword. The Word of God itself has been hammered out to make this coat! In Christ's day the Pharisees put it on, dressed as they were with all their frills: headbands, fimbriae, stoles and phylacteries!

Referring to the shod carmelites, the discalced Saint John of the Cross pointed out: "They are tainted with the vice of ambition and so they colour every one of their deeds so as to make them look good; and in that way, they're incorrigible." Ambition in religious people sometimes becomes a stronger passion than lust among their secular counterparts: it is one of the finest points of Pharisaism: they "love the chief seats... and love salutations in the marketplace", the vain honor that men tribute.

But the flower of all Pharisaism is cruelty: a sly one, a cagey, patient, prudent and low cruelty. And all the time "whoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service". Pharisaism is essentially a killer of men and God. And when it kills a man it does it because of God's part in its victim.

Instinctively, with more certainty and swiftness than a hound smelling a hare, the Pharisee detects and hates true religion. He is its enemy and antagonists have a way of recognizing each other. He knows for certain that if he doesn't kill the other man, he will be killed himself.

From then on, he that lives a genuine religiosity will always know that whatever he does will be considered evil, all his deeds will be seen as criminal. Scripture in his lips will only be blasphemy, truth a sacrilege, miracles works of black magic and lo!, if in a sudden outburst of righteous indignation he resorts to violence, even when the only damage results in a couple of well delivered blows and the bringing down of a few tables... Well then, the death sentence will be passed.

And all the time this drama plays out in silence, out of the light, deceitfully and by means of complicated combinations. The illegal death of a man, a cruel and wicked one, is decreed in gatherings where people invoke the Law with texts in their hands, in solemn religious conclaves which include dialogues and sentences where practically no one says nothing that is not in Holy Scriptures, freely quoting for their purposes the most sacred words in the world. "Verily I say unto you: they will not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

And all means serve their purpose if they are secretive enough: slander, bribery, deceit, distortion, false witnesses, threats. Caiaphas killed Christ with a summary of Isaiah's prophecy and the dogma of Redemption: "It is expedient for us that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

That is Christ's tragedy. That is how our Saviour died. All his gentleness, all his sweetness, all his tameness, all his kindness, his moderation, his eloquence, his entreaties, his tears, his flights, his warnings, his imprecations, his prophetic threats, his artistic talent, his blood, the mute imploration of the Eccehomo, were only to crash against the rock-hard heart of the Pharisee; you can make sons of Abraham out of rocks more easily than from those who deem themselves justified because they are from Abraham's blood.

It is Christ's and his Church's drama. If in the course of the centuries, an enormous mass of pain and even of blood had not been shed by other Christs in their resistance to the Pharisee, the Church today would not have subsisted. Pharisaism is the biggest evil on earth. There wouldn't be Communism on earth if it weren't for Pharisaism in religion; according to Saint Paul's words: *Oportet haereses esse...* "There must be also heresies among you..." (I Cor. XI:19).

And in the end, it'll get worse. In the last days, triumphant Pharisaism will require for it's cure the universe's total conflagration and the coming of the Son of Man Himself, but not before devouring the lives of innumerable men.

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**Christ and the Pharisees**

These days the worst evil that corrodes and threatens our Catholic religion is "exteriority" (or should we say "externality"?)—the same evil to which the Synagogue succumbed.

The main point of dissent between Catholics and Protestants originally was all about externals. Protestants protested against a Church that had become an imperialism of sorts, they rebelled against a Faith that had become only ceremonies and philantropy, against a Faith that had become more and more exterior: so they appealed to inwardness.

The Protestant rebellion marks historically the very moment in which religious exteriority broke the balance and seriously threatened inwardness. Certainly, no amount of rebellion or disobedience would cure the Church from this ailment; and that's how Protestantism not only did not remedy the evil, but, in fact, worsened it. Protestantism is an uprising against an imperfection that rather than turning it into a perfection, becomes a permanent rebellion—as its very name witnesses so clearly. To live "protesting" cannot constitute a religious ideal. One protests once against an abuse; and then one begins to live a life against the abuse in question or at least remains uncontaminated by it. He that keeps protesting wants others to do away with whatever he deems evil: he cannot or will not remove it himself.

But it's always possible to remove an abuse in itself; and that's the best way to protest against it. Luther protested against an abuse in the case of the indulgences and after that he himself abused the indulgence that was shown to him.

But Protestantism took away with itself a great captive truth. It wasn't all wrong. How could God possibly let the better half of Christendom fall into the clutches of heresy, and that by the agency of a syphilitic king and a coarse and bestial monk as they usually portrait Henry Tudor and Luther in most "Histories of the Counterreformation"? Little do they honour God those who conceive such an enormity.

If half of Europe ended up following and welcoming the religious uprising, that is because the whole of Europe had sunk into the worst religious crisis in world's history (the worst one ever recorded, there's still a worse one to come): Pharisaism was about to choke religion. Externals were devouring the true Faith.

It's easy to prove. How did it all start? With the question of the sale of indulgences. Was that a mere pretext? Did it happen by chance? Was it all much ado about nothing? Impossible.

The "indulgences" are nothing but a translation into externals of dogmas of the Faith that are true if they are sustained by interior life; however, their external translation can easily betray them to the point of turning them into the following monstrosity: "Give me your gold and I'll give you grace."

That is religious externality in it's extreme form.

The anonymous author of the "Lazarillo de Tormes" ridiculed what he called the "bulero" and with that the papal bulls and all manner of religion turned into a purely exterior thing, the trading of rites. And the Spanish common people invented this short story:

At the door of a church, a sexton of the XVth Century asked alms for the souls in Purgatory charging five pesetas for every plenary indulgence, backing his request with a big tableau behind him that depicted half naked bodies submerged in an enormous blaze with a notice that read: "A five peseta coin that enters and a soul gets out". Then a villager lets fall a five pesetas coin on the tray saying "for the soul of my father" and afterwards asked: "Did he get out?" To which the sexton answered pointing at the notice. So the surly man picked up his coin saying, "Well then, now that he's out, let's hope he isn't foolish enough to get in there again."

I remember that a red Catalan from Manresa once said to me in 1947, when in every Spanish church there was preaching and a "Bull for the Saintly Crusade" was offered: "Are you really saying that a man has the power to turn into a mortal sin (through which I lose my eternal destiny, the end to which I was created) by my deed of eating stewed meat? And that after that, if I give this man a coin, do you really believe that this man has the power to turn things around in such a manner that eating that pot of meat is no longer a mortal sin?"

Because this is what happens: a man stands up and says: "From now on, anyone who eats meat on Fridays does a terrible thing, punished with hell itself; but if he gives me a coin, eating meat on Fridays ceases to be a sin and becomes a harmless thing, as it was before."

Indulgences can be justified theologically and even when it's a rather complicated affair it is undeniably a logical one too. But if those syllogisms are to make up a true religion and not become the ridiculous framework of externality, then its subjects and priests must be God fearing people with a lot of Faith and much humbleness in the way they go about their rites: things hard to come by during the XVIth Century. In other words, the old pardons of the Primitive Church, based on a profound sense of sin, of mercy and the martyr's merits, had dried up inwardly and had become a more and more external practice; to the point that the devil of trade introduced itself into the empty shell.

No one can seriously suppose that the contention over the indulgences was an accidental occurrence or a mask that concealed one friar's arrogance, a product of badly baptized princes or the consequence of an entire nation poorly evangelized; that dry material wouldn't have ignited without the flame of anger that burnt in so many souls outraged by religious externality.

You'll find another symptom of what I'm saying in the famous "Rules for feeling with the Church" established by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises. These "rules" were directed against the spirit of those times, against Protestantism, and all of them defend religious externals, surely a praiseworthy thing in itself if you remember that the exterior is also necessary since man is not a pure spirit. A commendable thing for those times, anyway.

Saint Ignatius was Counter-Reformation's champion. With his mystical soul, after his conversion in Manresa and once in Paris, he took upon himself the main needs of the Church in those days and there and then founded his Society. There it was that he wrote these "rules" as a supplement to his book: "Praise the burning of candles—praise ceremonies and rites, praise long prayers at Church, conventual life, the scholastic tradition." This Basque even goes to the dangerous extremes of demanding faithful obedience to the ecclesiastical hierarchy in such terms that even if you see "white" you'll admit it's "black" when the Church authorities say so. In short, he recommends to do and say what appears to be *oppositum per diametrum* (as he puts it) to what the Reformers were doing: a very good recipe in tactical terms, but a dangerous formula in theological ones, for it is much too simple. The devil would've felt quite content if Christ had done the exact opposite of what he suggested to Him in his three temptations.

"Praise effigies, praise ceremonies and the burning of candles in the churches, praise long vocal prayers, vigils and fasting, scholastic philosophy, collections, conferences, Catholic activities, religious teaching", and so on. In those days it wasn't a bad agenda, especially in Spain, for Spaniards love to contradict each other whenever they can. They say a Spaniard once said to another one: "Hello, Manolo, it's a long time that I haven't seen you, but, well, well, well, how changed you are; to tell you the truth you don't even look like Manolo now!". And when the other one retorted: "Excuse me sir, but I'm not Manolo..." the man only insisted: "Oh! So you're not Manolo! Well then, I only said as much!".

I'm not so sure that "to praise the burning of candles" would do much good in these days. To put up a burning candle on an altar or, for that matter, six plaster statues (in 1953 the Council of Buenos Aires prohibited to put more than seven per altar) amounts to a minimum of religious feeling: it is an external act that substitutes and sometimes may summon spiritual motions. But if these acts don't summon inward feelings and only act as surrogates, it would be better to refrain from doing such things. In any case, those outward acts and the religious feelings they rouse are not to be praised (praise must be reserved for the very best things) and only tolerated or allowed, in the best of cases. You'll find no praise of candles in the Gospel, and we can well think that Jesus Christ never lighted one; he prayed under starlight and reproved those who prayed ostentatiously: in fact He ordered us to pray secretly. So this whole affair of "praising those who burn candles" for all I know could've been a good thing for Spaniards centuries ago; but nowadays there's no harm in not insisting on this sort of thing.

However, setting aside this whole business of candle-burning, our point here is that the very champion of the Counter-Reformation formulated his main contention against the Reformation on the same level that his adversary had chosen: the total acceptance or total rejection of external religious acts.

If nothing more were to be said, if you read this stormy saxon monk's life you'll easily find that before his conversion he was up to his eyes indulging in external religious acts to the point where he suddenly reverts violently to a purely inward religion—from the moment an associate of his was struck by lightning, a fact that induced him to take up religious orders until this business of the indulgences came up and he jettisoned it all. In his time, he was a Provost of sorts or a subprior in charge of no less than seven convents of his Order with quite a work overload, dealing with basically secular affairs never mind if they appeared to be sacred ones, to the point that he hadn't time for praying the breviary—so finally he was exempted from it, because he was "sacrificing himself for the good of the community" as Alphonse Daudet's funny monk would have put it. He himself noted the case in his peculiar way: "If all this friarly stuff could save a friar, no one has practiced it more than me; but it didn't do me much good." When he jettisoned all this "friarly stuff" and said "only the faith, the faith alone saves us and not our (external) works, the internal faith coated with Christ's merits like a cassock", he wasn't aware that he was throwing away religion's crust and skeleton and even the meat, disembodying the faith and leaving it like a flayed mollusk that is tossed into the storms of imagination or else into the steely armor of Pharisaism.

And he didn't realize this because he was an Occamist—or a Cartesian as we would say today. He didn't understand the subtle distinction between matter and form, hylomorphism. He thought that pure forms could subsist on a purely human level. But, in fact, among human beings, pure forms devoid from matter cannot subsist, not even on a religious plane.

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- II -

**The sweet Nazarene**

Some philosophers are currently saying that religion is a much too masculine affair, while others maintain that its feminine side is unwisely highlighted.

In his book, "Les Mystères de l'Orient", Dimitri Merejkowski says that Christianism has masculinized itself excessively allocating to God the traits of one of the sexes to the detriment of the feminine elements in beings; which, he contends, in the Primitive Church was represented by the person of the Holy Spirit; whose name, in fact, in Hebrew is a feminine one.

On the other side, an Austrian Jesuit, Ritschl, and a German one whose name I can't remember now, have written a pair of mediocre books recently translated into Spanish complaining that nowadays Catholicism has underlined its feminine side much too much, to the point that it has become a women's religion: whose only object is the "Sweet Nazarene" that Constancio Vigil depicts, duly symbolized by the abominable religious statues that represent those bland Christs with fair mops of hair, his index finger pointing at an open heart.

But the truth is that the Christ that emerges from the preaching one hears these days is not much of a man, nor of a woman either: he's more of a concept, if you ask me. They have shredded his personality, no less; and that necessarily means that the man himself has been suppressed; and consequently God Himself has been abolished, God who is a Person (or Three Persons), and whom is no abstract idea. The Christ they depict is there only to hold up morality; he props the "social mores"—that these days don't amount to much more than a stale morality; the same sort of by-product that the Pharisees had stemmed from Moses and Abraham.

Big slices of the Gospel that make preachers uncomfortable and that are difficult to put into practise have been jettisoned; naturally, the remains look rather incoherent and its bits and pieces can be put together in several ways; from where proceed a number of forged Christs that plague modern times.

Renan's Christ, the great and idyllic plebeian moralist; the Christ of Strauss, the dreaming poet; the resigned man of sweet sadness that Tolstoy depicts; the immense compassion opened to the world's iniquities as Schopenhauer would have it; the jurist and legislator of all case-by-case moralists; and finally the Sacred Heart of pious nuns, protector of all confirmed spinsters…

As the Bishop once said to the Philosopher: "Believe me, sir, the Sacred Heart has saved you… The Sacred Heart saved you from that car-crash." The philosopher held his head high and said: "The goodness of God cannot be proved by experience".

And he was right, up to a point. God's goodness can be mystically experienced but cannot be properly proved with experiments. Quite on the contrary, many people find that their experience of the world seems to prove exactly the opposite.

Christ's personality has been suppressed because his portraits omit his most distinctive trait by leaving out his essential mission. A man is defined by the work of his life: and in Christ's case, that was his fight against the Pharisees.

"Do you mean that a good beating can save a soul?". "No", is the usual answer. But if a good beating can't save a soul, Christ wouldn't have delivered any beatings. And the Gospel tells us about at least two terrific thrashings he gave the money changers when cleansing the temple.

Suppress Christ's manly outrage and you suppress his very manhood. Manly outrage has been suppressed from the list of Christian virtues. And a just indignation with all its gestures and effects is a virtue.

"Should a priest dare to take risks on account of a woman?" "Not so." In any case, most priests do not venture anything for women, nor for men, for that matter.

But Christ dared to save a damsel in distress, and on top of everything a disreputable one. In those times for a priest that meant terrible things: it brought absolute discredit on him. A Pharisee that touched the shadow of a woman walking the streets had to purify himself. As one can easily imagine, it seems that when they weren't on the streets that was another story.

Bigotry and prudishness are typical signs of Pharisaism; your saints curse anything carnal, as if they hadn't been born from a woman—which is not a sign of a chastity, quite the contrary. They feign to consider everything sexual as essentially unholy.

They despised women terribly; and were followed by lots of them, which is remarkable. Josephus says that much to their profit they socialized with rich women, and that they were held in much reverence by women in general.

There's a tendency in women to bow down to those that mistreat them. But this rather morbid leaning doesn't explain the whole case. Most probably, these women respected the Pharisees out of simple religiousness.

They say that women are more religious than men. It simply isn't true. But what is true is that women need more externals, a secure religion, an encoded, represented and social one. And the Pharisees provided just that.

"Women follow him"—was one of the charges the Pharisees brought up against Christ; a case of jealousy of their clientele. "Women go after him!", "He deals with publicans and prostitutes…"

And finally, to give another example, is it proper for a religious man to resist "Authority"? It is not appropriate to resist any authority whatsoever.

"Work for the Church, work for the Church!" said the Pharisees. What could be more holy? But they never said: "Work for God's Church!". They were the Church.

We've got it wrong: they didn't say "for the Church" but "for the Law". And yet, it's the same thing. They didn't say "for God's Law". They were the representatives of God: with that, everything had been said. Work for us.

The right formula is: "Work for God's Law, because it is God's, because it belongs to God, and only to that extent. Don't work for excrescences and outgrowths that man always introduces into the Law".

Those excrescences had grown so much in Christ's time that they stifled the Law. So it was time to simply say, like Christ did: "Work for God. That's all."

In a plebeian mentality, the law always tends to cover and darken the very reason of the law. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath", Christ used to say. He wrote Man with a capital letter; the Pharisees wrote Sabbath: the Idol emerges, one contrary to Life.

Alas for the people when Authority starts being written with a capital letter! Then it takes the place of Truth, which this time, indeed must be written with a capital letter, given that it is God Himself.

Our world knows perfectly well what it means when the State is written with a capital letter: the State with a capital letter is equivalent to organized immorality.

Who said so? Saint Augustin said it, and Nietzsche also; in a different sense.

The Pharisees were very patriotic: in Christ's days, the "Fatherland" stood for a clique of robbers armed to the teeth; the Roman's fatherland as much as the Jewish one.

That's why Christ refrained from pronouncing himself and refused to be dragged into the heated "nationalist" discussion, despite the fact that many in his audience wanted precisely that. "I refuse to take sides in party politics and contests of iniquity." Never mind: before Pilate they charged him of being another "nationalist".

"Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." The coins have Caesar's image stamped on them. Do not use the sword to retain that gold: let yourself be stripped of that gold by the Caesar. You shall become poor! That is not very important. The other thing is much worse; the other thing is suicide.

But just by saying this, it ended by being a suicide of sorts: telling the Truth.

Christ payed his tribute to the Caesar, after setting the record straight to the effect that He was under no obligation to do so. He did a miracle to pay it; a fairy tale miracle: he pulled out a fish from the sea and from this fish he pulled out a golden coin. The fish signified Himself; the coin signified his doctrine; the fish died to give it.

The true tribute that Christ payed to the Roman Empire was his blood; that is why he was under no obligation to pay any other sort. They extracted that tribute from him by force "to be a witness of Truth".

Even with his blood he preached respect for authority along with the super-respect for God: "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above."

The respect for authority that Saint Paul sternly preached didn't stop him preaching the truth: the proof is that he spent a long time in prison and finally was executed.

Nowadays, for lots of faithful people and clerics (and the faithful because of the clerics), respect for authority has become "political opportunism"; one must defer to anyone who's on the winning side; you're supposed to support the party that gives money to the Church; but sometimes things get even worse and authority becomes an idol and is justified even when it commits injustices. "Tell that fox to come and fetch me"—Christ said. Christ did not feel any respect for Herod's crimes.

The fight against this terrible deviation from the sacred is an undertaking in itself, a man's venture. That was Christ's venture, what he did as a man, what gives unity to all his deeds, the thread that connects his life to his death; his "Mission": the heart of his personality.

This struggle drove Christ to display all the virtues: the masculine and the feminine ones. His weapon was the word. The result was the setting-up of a new religious society, a vessel for Truth. The Truth… *Quid est veritas?—Est vir qui adest.*[[1]](#footnote-1) He was the Truth: total truth in body and soul.

Christ was a man in the full sense, with the sensitivity of an artist; and the artist has "a bit, or more than that of a woman"—said the poet. Because of that… Nietzsche, the atheist, for all his tremendous anti-Christian prejudice, stopped short before the figure of Christ. He dimly sensed what a character he was and admired him without quite knowing it. "To be entirely frank, of the true Jesus we know nothing"—he said, trying to shake off the deference he felt. But the case was that he himself knew nothing, misled as he was by the Protestant tradition in which he had been brought up and which he rightly regarded with suspicion.

Nietzsche asked himself if Jesus in fact hadn't been a mystical aristocrat. That he was: an aristocrat in the nietzschean sense, that is to say, a soul of absolute nobility, with integrity beyond doubt, wholly free. And a mystic just as the German himself, even if he himself attacked "mysticism", false mysticism.

"Didn't the Pharisees get it wrong," he goes on to say, "believing him to be a plebeian, a demagogue of sorts?"

No, they were not mistaken. They felt him to be what he was, a king, a dethroned king, and therefore a nobleman and a man of the people too—and they hated him for it. They themselves, who had usurped the theocratic authority. The opposite of a nobleman is a fake nobleman, not the ordinary man of the street. Noblemen and ordinary people suppose each other, something Nietzsche failed to see (that is why his remarkable moral order fails from it's very inception).

The Pharisees were phonies, fake noblemen, false aristocrats, a sham "élite". The crystallization of ethics converted into external precepts is a typical trait in a plebeian; just as an undistinguished intelligence will characteristically confuse ends and means, nearly always maliciously.

When a nobleman doesn't find his place, he seeks the last place. This is what Christ did when he found the people in such an appalling situation. He realized in himself the Parable of the Great Banquet: he took the lowest place until he was invited to the highest, always knowing that he belonged there. He sinked to the lowest station among the populace knowing that the throne was his rightful place.

"A nobleman takes a vengeance on the injustice he suffers by hurting himself even more. He resists oppression oppressing himself a little more."

Chesterton's maxim seems foolish; but it's not, it is nothing else than a translation of the gentleman's code of turning the other cheek and of letting who took away your coat have your cloke also. That's what Christ did. It isn't equivalent to Tolstoy's sheeply rendering of nonresistance to evil. It is a lion's gesture, not a sheeply one.

You exile me for a year?

I exile myself for four!

The Lion of Judah, the Son of David… People weren't deceived about Christ's personality. They saw a leader. They were foxed by the type of leadership he embodied. They wanted to make him a king; a temporal king and a revolutionary as the Pharisees would have it and taught them to believe.

They didn't see in him the man of "infinite resignations" that Tolstoy saw… and Almafuerte. Those are no good as leaders.

*Seuls les coeurs de lion sont les vraies coeurs de père…*

That's why it's a fine thing to put fire in Jesus's Heart; but none of the ambiguous modern fires: the fires of romantic passion, the sparkler fire of effeminate sweetness.

Consequently, Catholic religion is not too masculine, nor too feminine. These days it is an unbalanced religion where both the masculine and feminine aspects have been exaggerated in order to flatter a cheap and ignorant public: for instance, the masculine aspects of what is legal, prescriptive and disciplinary with which bossy clerics sometimes think they are ruling the world—and they're only doing harm; or the feminine aspects of tenderness, of what is conciliatory, a certain indifferent benevolence with which other rascals (sometimes they're the same people) easily conquer audiences and are followed by flocks of fans.

In short, nowadays, Christ's religion, such as it is presented, is an unhuman religion, a dehumanised, a disembodied one (and, therefore, you'll find no man or woman here)—at least that's the religion preached by countless charlatans and the one you encounter in the practices of lots of self-righteous Pharisees.

Because the supreme completion of the Pharisees' leaven results in a dehumanised religion and in that way they have successfully refashioned it into an ungodly thing; and that—strange thing—by making it too human; I mean, much too much like themselves; absolutely excluding any other "spirit". "You hath a devil spirit, you hath a bad spirit"—they said to Christ.

"Anyone with a different spirit from mine, hath a bad spirit"; at heart, that is what a Pharisee thinks.

The opposite is exactly true.

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- III -

**Thrice assaulted**

*Hadn't I watch out,*

*the bastard would've speared me.*

(José Hernández, “Martín Fierro”)

Before being legally killed, and that in a disgraceful manner with great luxury of torments, Jesus Christ was the object of several murder attempts. The Gospels remembers three.

In his third trip to Jerusalem, for the feast of *Skenopegia*, and perhaps much before, Jesus calmly questioned his opponents:

*Why do you want to kill me?*

Those spontaneous attacks from the mobs that fail mysteriously, stem from the slanders the Pharisees spread about him.

*Who wants to kill you? You hath a devil!*

They were calling him possessed over and over again.

Evidently, nothing could be better for the Pharisees than a sudden tumult and assassination of the young prophet by the mob. They much favoured the indefinite pronoun: Monsieur "On" is irresponsible and sacred. To go by historians à la Michelet, the French Revolution was Monsieur's On's doing. Augustus Cochin calls it "Monsieur On's ordeal":

*On se facha, on courut aux Tuileries, on appella le Roi… on le tua.*

Augustus Cochin investigated who the devil was Monsieur On. In his findings he discovered that behind the formless mouvements and the rabble's apparently spontaneous outbreaks, there were perfectly organized groups moving in the shadows that operated with precise plans, secret agents and specific orders. Monsieur On doesn't exist.

The Gospels tell the same story when they deal with the question of the Barabbas plebiscite. The chief priests and the sanhedrites "moved the people"—they "shook them", says Mark—inducing them to vote in favour of Barabbas and against Jesus.

The first attempt against Jesus Christ took place in his home town, or at least so it is thought (*in patria sua, ubi erat nutritus*); he didn't want to do any miracles in Nazareth (or rather, as Mark explains "he couldn't") and they were furious. He couldn't do any "because of their incredulity"; and yet they seemed to be extremely credulous for they expected him to realize more miracles there than anywhere else because it was "where he had been brought up". So he read in the synagogue Isahias' prophecy on the miracles the Future Anointed one would do, then he closed the book and he gave it again to the minister ("and the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him"), and he began his explanation saying: "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

But after that, when they saw that he didn't do more miracles than those realized in Capernaum (for he only cured a few sick) and when he explained the paradoxical reason for that: "precisely because this is my home town", they were filled with wrath and rose up and thrust him out of the city. And after that, "they led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong." Why they actually didn't, is not known. He just passed "through the midst of them and went his way." Perhaps his very composure prevailed.

The small-town bout of wrath, this mob of foolish people, this frustrated and unmotivated homicide, are all strange things. But they’re not that wonderful: behind all that we find what Jesus himself called "the leaven of Pharisaism", the devil's hand of hypocrisy.

In the first place, the leaven of Pharisaism appears in the expectation of a bizarre Messiah, an arrogant type, a haughty jerk, and a belligerent one at that. And now they come up against this calm, sedated man, who even looks a bit melancholic! Over there, they all knew his father, his mother and his brothers James, Joseph, Judah and Simon and his sisters, the whole family; and they had seen him handling the plane and the hammer…

Still more pharisaic, the other result from the leaven of Pharisaism was that they recognized him as the Messiah, but wanted him to settle in Nazareth, where he was practically born. These national claims are natural and very common, and one could well think that Christ didn't think too badly of them. Haven't I heard similar claims in Italy and Spain, countries of deeply entrenched faith! Not to mention Argentina with its sleepyhead faith.

"God is Argentinian", "God is French", "God is German", "God is Spanish"… it seems that it suffices for God to hear these sort of things and he walks away without doing miracles. What can be so evil in these endearing appropriations so common among simple people? Christ said nothing more than this: "I don't do miracles here because I belong here; I do miracles in foreign lands."

God is a foreigner.

Nevertheless, I'm continually hearing preachers promising God's special help, even miraculous help, to the natives of one region or the other for the only reason that they belong there, because of the deep and entrenched faith that has always characterized their people, because of the holiness of their fathers and their glorious traditions. That is an innocent form of Pharisaism.

But this innocent form of Pharisaism can well end up in an attack on Christ. When all is said and done, the very fact of delivering silly, vain, bumptious, sycophantic and hollow sermons to poor people constitutes an attack on Christ in its own right.

The two other attempts on Jesus' life took place in Jerusalem, in the Temple or nearby, when he went up there for the third time. They occurred in two different occasions and not once, twice told. John himself told them and his narratives are entirely different. One was in the Gazophylacium (the temple's treasury), the other at Solomon's Porch, one when the feast of *Skenopegia* (Tabernacles), the other during *Hanukkah* (Dedication of the Temple). In both occasions they took up stones to cast at him and also violently sought to take him. The first time, says John, he hid himself. On the second occasion he escaped out of their hand.

Both times the attempted murder was because he said that he was God. Christ no longer veiled his divinity. He was already in his third year, he had sowed his walks with stupendous miracles.

*Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?*

*Verily, verily, I say unto you: before Abraham was, I am.*

And the next time, even more explicitly:

*I and my Father are one.*

This statement is unique in the world, it is enormous. They should have executed him there and then; or conversely, kneel down before him. The great mystics have said that through love they actually were one, or else that they were made into one thing with God. Al-Hallaj the mystic says in a poem:

*Before I was near You*

*You were near me,*

*Oh the Chosen One.*

*Now, near and far*

*Have disappeared.*

But Christ says more: not only that he is made one thing with God through love, but that what he does, his Father does; what he says, his Father says; his Father lives and continually creates and he creates jointly. And that whoever sees him, sees the Father too.

For these legal minded Pharisees a great trial seemed timely enough. Clearly an enormous assertion had been put forward. It was time to set up a trial, requiring reasons, proofs and justifications; to sentence this man as the greatest blasphemer ever or else to go down on their knees before the "Principle that speaks in you", the Beginning of all things mysteriously become human nature, body and soul of a man.

But finally it all ended up in two or three cowardly gestures, in rogue motions and bigoted insults, in grunts and gossip and useless conversations, in vain and impertinent curses. What annoyance and weariness must have filled Christ's heart seeing humanity carrying on in this muddy, dull and despicable manner!

But meantime the great legal assassination was being brewed, the main points layed out, the proper occasion anticipated, dark minds were losing their trepidations of messing things up, disregarding their fear of the populace and of their own overt responsibility, shaking off their horror of appearing with blood on their hands, these most "saintly and sapient" of men. Christ had already prophesied once, twice, and thrice his own death, with all its characteristics and circumstances.

He knew better than his enemies where he was going. If on three occasions he evaded his impromptu assassination it was because, says the mysterious Evangelist, "his time had not yet come". Pharisaism had to appear in its true light.

Religious pride is homicidal, it will even kill God. A son of the devil, it's the "first assassin", the root of death and the enemy of life. Pharisaism will kill even if it doesn't want to, not because of anything bad in its victims but precisely for what is divine in them. Of course, they don't want death, they're only interested, as they profess to be, in providing for the common good, entrusted by God to care for the best interests of religion and the salvation of all the people, so that "the whole nation perish not".

You should have seen these righteous people of the Temple checking those who wanted to stone Jesus and that were making a racket and yelling at the top of their voices: "Hold it! Hold it! Calm down, calm down! Wait a moment! Not yet! Let him talk a bit more! Let him explain himself! All in good time! Let the authorities take matters into their own hands. After all, we're at the Temple's Atrium! The very idea of staining with blood the Gazophylacium! There's too many people around, you could hurt a poor woman or a child here! He's with all his disciples! Today is the Lord's feast! We must bide our time!”

And once back in their premises: "What a hectic afternoon at the Temple! Had it not been for us, the rabble would have lynched the man… But we prevented it. Of course, this man has overstepped his bounds. This is the limit. It's quite evident that this has to stop. But we must see 'how'… that's the important thing… how".

And when the "time" was right, they killed him in the most clumsy, rowdy, shocking, muddled, topsy-turvy way that you can imagine; though also (and this time their instincts didn't let them down) in the most horribly cruel fashion.

Oh Lord, give me enough strength to contemplate Pharisaism without too much fear, without too much disgust. But also, give me your grace so as to be able, like you, to look at it in its face.

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- IV -

**The challenge**

*An innocent pastime,*

*a harmless one at that,*

*like spitting from a bridge,*

*or getting yourself crucified.*

(Leopoldo Lugones)

Jesus Christ deliberately got himself killed.

German rationalist critics have argued so, in line with the Judaic-Talmudic tradition. What to do with a man that is constantly taunting the legally constituted authorities? That has a bad influence? That, albeit innocently, becomes a danger to the established religion and the thousands of faithful that find their eternal salvation in it? "Subjectively, you may have thought you were acting properly; but objectively you have made a mess of things" said Caiaphas to Jesus with technical precision.

Why he got himself killed is explained variously: consciously or not; and if the latter, owing to religious bigotry or pastoral simple-mindedness; which is how Renan the fantasist has it. This last hypothesis is the most absurd of all. That the simple and candid "sweet Nazarene" let himself be drawn down by a chain of intoxicating popular successes without surmising the consequences until it was too late, is a supposition that one can hardly reconcile with all and every one of the Gospel texts. If we were to find grounds for the mere possibility of such a speculation, we would have to write four different Gospels, and for that matter, quite opposite to those extant.

That religious passion blinded him, like Strauss explains; that he thought he would overcome his enemies or at least miraculously be delivered from them by the agency of "twelve legions of angels" at the last minute, are all highly unlikely conjectures. The texts definitely say the opposite. Christ predicted his own martyrdom, reproached his enemies for wanting to kill him (they denied it of course), hid himself, escaped from their hands more than once, as we have seen. These are hypothesis not to discuss, purely ficticious ones, a product of feverish imaginations. The very idea… If the Gospel texts are so deceitful that it suffices to hold the title of "German Professor" to interpret them the wrong way round, well then we know absolutely nothing about Christ. For heaven's sake, shut up.

But isn't it possible that he deliberately seeked his own death convinced that that was the world's salvation?

The question raises the subject of "the right to die for Truth", that is to say, the subtle "temptation of martyrdom" that the poet T.S. Eliot introduces as the fourth and most dangerous of all, in his tragedy, "Murder in the Cathedral", where the saintly Archbishop Thomas of Canterbury overcomes it.

Has a man a right to make other men murder him for the Truth to succeed? What a man that would be! Whatever, but supposing that such a man exists, has he any right to act like that?

In Saint Cyprian's times there were Christians who brought persecution on themselves by toppling idols or by unseasonably manifesting their faith. The Church condemned them; and they formed a heretical group called the "provokers". We have seen the same thing repeated in times of the English persecutions, above all on occasion of the Gunpowder Plot; an event that inspired one of the remarkable incidents in R.H. Benson's apocalyptical novel "The Lord of the World": the Christian that shoots Oliver Brand when he blasphemes and is lynched by the crowd; the conspiration to blow up the Cathedral during the sacrilegious ceremony of the Adoration of Man that provokes Cardinal Percy Franklin's useless return… and Rome's demolition.

Of course, it must be said that these "crimes" avenge other crimes, enormous if you will. But, to sacrifice yourself without hurting no one? Didn't Christ do exactly that?

Kierkegaard, the poet and mystical Danish pastor, experienced first-handedly a similar dilemma throughout his life; he got it wrong once, but finally resolved it. It was Savonarola's quandary; it was Thomas More's predicament, and perhaps even Bartolomé Carranza's.

How should a Christian act in a decayed Church, let us say a corrupted one; a true man who's fate is to live in bad times? What does Faith require of him, and what is he allowed to do? May he keep quiet? Should he speak up? The plight complicates itself terribly with further questions. What is his public mission? To what extent is the Church corrupted? What positive effects can he expect if he cries out? How should he sound the alarm? The categorical commandment of "witnessing Truth" that was Christ's specific mission becomes a prickly one in Socrates' case, a distressing one in Kierkegaard's, and an unspeakably puzzling one for a simple layman.

Two extreme attitudes are illicit: one is to accommodate yourself to error (the easiest way out), the other one is to trigger your martyrdom.

Kierkegaard protested that he couldn't accommodate himself to the rampant ecclesiastic disorder that in fact led the faithful into errors and devastated the Faith. "I can't morally, and I can't even physically," he used to say. In my case, the ministry of preaching the word which was bestowed on me when I was ordained has seen itself duplicated by my innate vocations of poet and teacher, missions I cannot turn down without condemning my faculties to absolute idleness and that would be tantamount to the ruin of my whole inward life. Whoever writes will know perfectly well that he cannot even physically resist the word that takes shape in him without abandoning himself to a torturing and dangerous contraceptional operation, like the suffocating and killing of fetuses, unfortunately a well known practice these days. If I cannot make myself useful in any other way than by writing and preaching, how could I possibly save my soul if I give up the fight?

In my case and in Barrantes Molina's [[2]](#footnote-2) for instance, all this may seem a bit over the top, I may be somewhat exaggerating; not in Kierkegaard's case however. He just couldn't keep quiet. Even his mental balance depended on his intellectual work. To shut up would have literally amounted to suicide; and the worst possible one, at that. "*Must it be said? Well, then, we'll say it*", was the title of his last pamphlet consisting of ten articles on religion and the Lutheran Church, that, one surmises, he payed for with his life. He collapsed in a heap in one of Copenhague's streets and died from sheer exhaustion at a hospital when the controversy he had sparked off was in full swing; but from the moment he decided to "say it" a composed joy followed him up to the last moment, a sign of divine approval, we suspect.

Because he had seen earlier on that "there is no right to die for truth", this is to say, to burden other people, even people wickedly deceived, with an assassination. Humility compels to shun martyrdom—if not charity, or simple modesty: I'm not sure I can cope with such a thing, I'm not sure that I'm in possession of the whole truth; on the contrary, I'm practically certain that I'm not. What Christ couldn't say, all Christians must. There's a mix of passion and short-sightedness in me, even when I'm positive that I'm doing my very best to see things for what they are, that warns me that I'll never know for sure. Undoubtedly I must follow the truth I can see, I have no choice and I must live on; but that is for me only, not something to impose on others.

How can we reconcile this with the duty, when not the downright physical impossibility, of *not* keeping oneself to oneself? Kierkegaard reached an incredible conclusion: one must humiliate oneself to the uttermost, to the point even of falling below the one that is deceived, lavish thoughtful attentions upon him, obtain forgiveness from him for the truth that is in oneself. For what does a nurse do, doesn't she become a slave to the sick one so that she can remove his sickness, therefore paying her tribute of gratitude to God for her own good health?

To comply with this arduous plan, Kierkegaard adopted the strange deportment of defaming and discrediting himself. He had to tell his neighbors and brothers that they were being bad Christians, and in what ways: "you'll find nothing more corrupted than the priests", but he began by denying that he himself was a Christian; and started to call himself a walking sinner and a corrupted one at that: he was a priest.

In Christ's case this won't do. But Christ annihilated himself before the Pharisees, complying with all their precepts and laws to an impossible degree, answering all their questions and objections, resorting to countless parables, arguments and explanations in the face of people who in bad faith questioned him, and that, in some cases, didn't even have the right to do so; and even if they legally appeared to have such rights, they were only apparent. And to all appearences he made Himself a sinner. Sure. He let himself be seen with sinners and publicans ("hunt with cats and you catch only rats") and did not indignantly look daggers at female sinners. To do so, would have been so easy and politically correct! In any case, what? Couldn't he thunder, once at least, like all preachers do, against all sinners, against the undermining of morals and good customs, rampant corruption, the filth of the flesh, and those shorter and shorter bathing suits coming out from Greece? No, not one word about "the beaches"! Only luminous parables, poetic comparisons and general rules, namely poetry, poetry and more poetry! Where is this leading?

Apparently Christ didn't see impurity; maybe out of sheer purity. He never indulged himself in calling a carnal sinner a pig. When he was told to speak to one, he bowed his head and kept quiet.

So, the solution is that one has to seek martyrdom going about one's business and being what one really is *in eternity*. This is to say: "Don't tell any lies; don't say any truth if there is no need." The difficulty lies in establishing when a truth is necessary. *Non tacebo* (I will keep quiet), wrote Campanella the madman in his cell; and, in fact, his lot was to indwell it for no less than 26 years, a man's life; and the odd thing was that he was being punished for having plotted against the Spanish government, and the Neapolitan Dominican when the truth was that he was a furious Hispanophile and a member of the imperial party; *Non tacebo*. A truth is necessary when it'll save a soul—and sometimes to bring home the bacon; all the more if both things are called for. For instance, if I'm going to earn my daily bread by writing poetry (God forbid, don't say that, not even as a joke), well, then I must write the most artistic possible poems and aspire to attain the highest poetic beauty; which is no other than the truth; for a very well versed poet told me that every time he couldn't come up with a good line, when he finally achieved it, it became clear that what had happened was that the faulty verse hadn't truth in it; or not enough truth, as he put it.

There's no risk of overdoing my poetry like Shakespeare sometimes does, cluttering his lines bewilderingly to a noisome point; but if by putting sufficient truth in a poem I get into hot water and as a result I am imprisoned by the communists, or if I get a ticket from the Cardinal Primate, it's all tickety-boo since I've only done my duty.

But on the next day I'll get another job, unless it's one of those (so help me God) jobs that one cannot jettison, like being a freemason, a spouse, a priest or a journalist.

And that's what happened to Kierkegaard; and through him we can infer what happened to Jesus Christ. They were atrociously frank. If they had a tongue, they just had to speak up ("*credidi, propter quod loquutus sum*"), and if they spoke out they had to say, not only one thing true, but the very truth; in other words, declare what in a concrete and specific case is required, things that from the bottom of my heart I cannot but see, things that through all my senses I see, live and drink.

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- V -

**The sociology of Pharisaism**

Let's be done with Theology and try for a moment to see from a bit closer, à la Augustus Comte, what actually was going on in this society of the "separated" (*Phêrushim* or *phjêrishajja*, from where Pharisees).

We've already said what happened; but the casuistry, the bigoted ritualism, the political Messianism and the politics itself are no more than symptoms or the expression, if you will, of these people's ghoulish leanings. What made it possible? It was a society that socialized itself: this is to say, that closed ranks around itself.

From a religious point of view when this happens to a society it becomes a closed sect: it can maintain itself entirely orthodox and claim to be perfectly faithful to the head of the Church, but it's not "Catholic" anymore. It's bonds with the head are purely external.

When an organism begins to gravitate "insidewards"… cancer is its name.

It's a bad sign for a social body when "unity" is its main worry to the detriment of "purpose" (Oh my God! I've just been listening to a man raving endlessly about the need for a greater "unity among Spaniards". What rubbish! I mean, unity, unity… for what? Tell us *for what* in the first place…)

It's a dreadful symptom when anybody begins to reflect too much about himself, especially if that concern shadows the real object of that society in particular, it's very raison d'être: which is exactly what happens to sick people, as Saint Thomas Aquinas observed. "The end of anything whatsoever cannot be its own preservation."

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- VI -

**In self-defense**

*And then,*

*don't they say*

*that he's a bad sort,*

*just because the man fights back?*

(José Hernández, “Martín Fierro”)

All things considered, Christ's anti-Pharisaic campaign, much as it seems an aggressive one, was in self-defense. The racket he kicked up in the Temple with which he began his struggle is in fact an allegation of his Messianic mission; and his terrible speech on the "Woes of the Pharisees" with which he rounded it off represents a supreme effort to save his life, already condemned, using the most powerful weapons: the curse and the prophetic threat.

The expulsion of the traders from the Temple is something quite surprising; as baffling, let us say, as when he stayed there, years before, without informing his parents—if one disregards what Christ was.

Two distinct Messianic statements destroy Renan's well known theory, namely that Christ was no more than a Galilean peasant and a lofty moralist that started to preach the interior and universal religion of Moses against the external and distorted religion of the narrow-minded Pharisees; and that with his string of successes he became more and more enthusiastic; that he conceived the idea that the world would soon come to its end; that he identified himself with the Messianic King and that finally, after his triumph on Palm Sunday, he pronounced exalted words by which he assimilated himself to God himself, of all things; mystical expressions that the authorities did themselves no favour in taking at face value; but that according to the Jewish laws deserved capital punishment.

This is pure fantasy. The truth is that from the very beginning, all of Christ's deeds were imprinted with the Messianic stamp. Before starting off a great campaign the Hebrews used to fast for forty days, and this was a well-known fact as showed in Moses and Elijah's precedents.

Incidentally, Riccioti greatly errs when he considers the fast a miraculous feat, an inexplicable and supernatural one; saying that "the fasting is evidently presented by the Evangelists as an absolute supernatural deed"; and then deeming the fact that after those forty days he felt hunger, an extraordinary one. That fasting is within the reach of any human organism, and the fact that hunger disappears after the first three or four days of absolute diet and that it reappears with special force around the 40th day (which is the life span of a red corpuscle), is what usually happens.

We refer to a complete fast in which one drinks water: the Evangelists don't say that Jesus didn't drink. This fasting is very well known in Eastern countries, albeit as a therapeutic practice; and we know of several people who have practised it without inconvenient and to their advantage. In Christ's times it had religious significance, namely the preparation for a great mission. It's certainly not as easy as pie, but it isn't a miracle either—unless it's without drinking water. In that case we believe it to be biologically impossible, one couldn't go on for forty days without water unless it were a miracle.

So the fasting and subsequent temptations are Messianic in themselves. The account of the miracle at Cana, where Christ appears to do it as a kind of deference to his friends, concludes saying that "his disciples believed in Him", namely the disciples that the Baptist had sent over, Peter and Andrew, John and his brother. The baptism and testimony of John are nothing else than a solemn consecration of Christ's Messiahship. And the new prophet's first public action had all the trappings of an act of authority which must have felt like the roar of a bomb explosion.

The rejection of the Messiah modestly born in Galilee had already begun with his forerunner and first disciple, John the Baptist. The Pharisees hadn't recognized the new prophet and opposed him, as one can easily gather from the violent imprecations and threats he dedicated to them, evidently after the "examination" that John the Gospel Writer evokes, an occasion in which, conversely, the Baptist answered with due modesty and respect. In that inquiry the Pharisees learnt that the Baptist, by his own confession, was not the Messiah, wasn't Elijah, and that his authority proceeded from someone much greater than himself, someone who was to show up, who was already among them, and whom they knew not. All three Synoptic Gospels refer the same thing: "They didn't believe him" (Math. XXI:23-27; Mark XI:27-33; Luke XX:1-8).

Very probably, as the Gospels seem to show, this "confession" set the Pharisees against John and it's then and there that they began to fight him by undermining his authority; and through him, attack his "Better", the One on whom he rested. One mustn't forget that in those times the lodge was in possession of all the necessary religious information: the Doctors of the Law held the key of the organized and efficient network of preachers that covered all of Judea, just like our modern parishes. In view of the results of the official comission's "examination" and when to all intent and purposes matters were coming to a head, however they didn't follow suit, a Pharisee tactic they repeated now and again: they could present John as a heretic and a lunatic of sorts; which is, to all intent and purposes, what they did, given that they immediately did the same thing with Christ as the Gospel clearly records. "You're nuts. You have a devil. You contradict the law of Moses." As we have said, the Pharisees held the keys to all religious information, all the "ecclesiastic bulletins" were at their disposal, so to say.

On the face of it, one could think that Christ defended himself violently, but on second thoughts Christ's gentleness is stunning; naturally, it's the case of a king defending himself from an usurper: and for all his meekness he is not their inferior.

They could have seized him at the Atrium, a single man armed with only a belt, against a crowd; and the fact that they didn't only shows that they had a guilty conscience (and the weakness that naturally follows), something felt not only by the merchants themselves, but by the guardian priests and vergers of the Temple also. So they limited themselves to question him.

To their questions, Jesus answered by claiming a special relationship with God and that specific house ("my Father's house"); and when they demanded a miracle he didn't deny that he could do them: nay, he declared that he could realize a wonderful prodigy, a greater one that they couldn't even imagine, a shocking one.

The show of indignation and authority, a sort of parable in deeds, does not repeat itself until the end of Christ's campaign, if the fracas that the Synoptics relate at the end (Math XXI:12-17; Mark XI:15-19; Luke XIX:45-48) isn't the same one that John, who's more careful about chronology, tells us about at the beginning of his Gospel (II:12-22), as some say. It amounts to the same thing. The Jews understood him all right. And the Pharisees' reaction is a perfect confirmation of the Messianic declaration "but when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet" (Math XXI:46).

The rest of Christ's defense is a verbal one blended with his mission as a Teacher, Reformer and Prophet. With these vacuous doctors, it's a constant argument.

It includes the denunciation of the pharisaic casuistry as vane, inane and perverse; establishes that man would not obtain salvation by belonging to any one nation, race, sect, congregation or group in particular, nor by possessing the true doctrine, not even by doing miracles, but only through love of God and neighbor with justice as its foundation, and mercy as its flower; by completing merely external precepts with the introduction of holiness and inward sanctity; he warned his disciples against the widespread pharisaic spirit, that he called "yeast"; and told them to undo their stratagems and triumphantly brave their questioning; he gradually depicted Pharisaism with worse and worse traits; and lastly he resorted to curse and divine threats, in the ancient prophet's manner. Naturally, one has to believe that the struggle could not but increase as the persecution escalated and murder was felt imminent; and that the terrible woes from Mathew XXIII represent the last stage in this long fight, pronounced when the murderous intentions were all too evident and known as a fact to all and sundry. "Isn't this the man they wanted to kill? And how come he's preaching unhindered in the Temple?".

The discussion with the Pharisees suffuses and frames all Christ's preaching, in its time a highly topical and dramatic subject. The Hebrews loved improvised musical dialogues, just like our peasants and all primitive people in general: people like to be instructed and learn by listening to the pros and cons of a thesis debated by experts. And in fact, it's the most natural and efficient way of convincing, a combination of instruction, fight and play. It's as interesting as football.

The discussion with the doctors gave Christ the chance to brilliantly unfold his teachings: even the parables with which he describes, defines and bases his kingdom, are pointedly aimed at the pharisaic idea of a false Messianic kingdom. His answers to subtle, muddled or cunning questions, that now we find simple, so many times have we heard them, are brilliant. It brings to mind the dangerous questioning of Joan of Arc.

Sometimes he dodges a question answering back with a question of his own; just like the Galitian peasants; other times he answers with a parable or an antithesis, a metaphor, or some other unexpected sentence; when there is good faith he speaks straightly; for instance, when the Scribe who had asked which was the greatest commandment and having given witness "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; truly the love of God and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices", he is rewarded with this invitation: "Thou are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark XII:34).

The typical example of a dodged question is that narrated by the three synoptics when they deal with the last days of Christ’s preaching, in the Temple, and not in the presence of one doctor only but before lots of them assembled, plus all the people. They ask him practically in an official capacity—"the princes of the priests", or prelates as it were, the scribes, which is to say the theologians, the ancients of the people or magistrates all rolled into one: "Tell us by what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?" (Math XXI:23).

He had told them already a hundred times. The question was directed to make him publicly confess that he hadn't their permission to preach, or else seeking to refute him in front of everyone.

He answered back saying: "I'll ask you something too, and if you answer, then I shall tell you with what power I act. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? Answer me." (Math XXI:25).

All things considered, this question includes the answer to the other one: I do this by the authority vested in me by God Himself as John the Baptist has resolutely testified. His question traced the matter to its sources, it wasn't a subterfuge only.

And that is how they saw it. "If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet."

They hastily retreated: "We don't know."

It was their duty to know. They didn't want to say it. That's why Jesus doesn't answer them as they expected by saying something like "Neither do I know what you ask me about", but instead: "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things"—even if in fact he had answered them in the refined style of Semitic counterpoints. Undoubtedly the crowd must have endorsed him with a murmur of approval.

Another example of the other two ways of answering, the direct and the parabolic, is found in the most beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan.

The preaching is already full-blown, the 72 disciples have come back, Christ has traveled all over Judea, he's on everyone's lips. A Doctor of the Law approaches him and questions him simply: "Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Math. XIX:16). This one must have belonged to the seventh class of Pharisees such as the Talmud classifies them, a "Pharisee from fear", in other words, a truly religious man. The other six classes were disastrous: "Pharisee for the money", "bigoted Pharisee", "uncouth Pharisee", "inconsistent Pharisee", "lame Pharisee" and the "kizai Pharisee", a calculator so to say. That's how the Talmud classifies them.

So Christ answers him with the same simplicity: "You are a Doctor, what does the Law say?"

He replies with words from both the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus combined—perhaps he knew how Christ himself had once pronounced himself on that matter: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."

Jesus approved and quoted the Leviticus in turn: "You have well said. This do and thou shalt live."

But the other one wanted to make it clear that he was addressing a real difficulty and not pointing to a well-known reference connected to a hotly debated question by the casuistry of the times, one muddled by national pride: exactly who is "my neighbor" for an Israelite. Perchance do the idolatrous, the Samaritans, the arrogant and oppressive Romans, also belong in that category?

*And who exactly is my neighbor?*

Jesus seized the chance and adopted the nabi-him's attitude and began to improvise in oral style for everyone's benefit, one of his "rythmic recitations", comparable to "The romance of the Cid" or to our "payadas"[[3]](#footnote-3) if you will:

*A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,*

*when he was attacked by robbers.*

*They stripped him of his clothes,*

*beat him and went away,*

*leaving him half dead.*

*A priest happened to be going down the same road,*

*and when he saw the man,*

*he passed by on the other side.*

*So too, a Levite,*

*when he came to the place and saw him,*

*passed by on the other side.*

*But a Samaritan,*

*as he traveled,*

*came where the man was;*

*and when he saw him, he took pity on him.*

*He went to him and bandaged his wounds,*

*pouring on oil and wine.*

*Then he put the man on his own donkey,*

*brought him to an inn and took care of him.*

*The next day he took out two denarii*

*and gave them to the innkeeper.*

*‘Look after him,’ he said,*

*‘and when I return,*

*I will reimburse you...*

The tale is crystal clear; and maybe something like that had really happened. On the one hand, the 37 kilometer road between Jerusalem and Jericho was a busy one, but for all that, it also passed through some rather tricky woods where gangs of thieves were known to abide, especially at the point the Jews used to call "The little bloody turn". Christ might have heard about the incident when passing through Jericho around those days. It is well known that the greater poets are less prone to make things up, even if they rephrase everything that gets to their ears. It is quite certain that the people would have said: "This is true. Things happened exactly like that." After this, the narrator turned to the theologian and asked him: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?  The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” And Jesus said to him: “Go and do likewise” (Luke X:25-37), in the same vein as the previous epilogue: "This do and thou shalt live," this time declaring it under his own authority. The parable was striking (A Priest! A Levite! A Samaritan! Assaulted and stabbed!) and highly anti-Pharisaic not only because of the daring denunciation of the liturgical castes' heartlessness but above all in proclaiming the principle of "proximity" of all human being in need, never mind the caste to which he happens to belong. In the end, mercy is what regulates the proximity between men and not frontiers or social rank—for a certain deep compassion or "sympathy" substantiates true love in such a way that in certain circumstances I may find myself under the grave duty of doing a father's or brother's part to a complete stranger if he's very much in need and no one more obliged than myself is in sight; according to Saint Augustine: "If you could have saved him and you didn't, you have killed him". *Si reliquisti dum servare potuisti, illum occidisti.*

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- VII -

**Woes of the Pharisees**

(Math XXII)

*Woe unto you, scribes*

*and Pharisees, hypocrites!*

Not all the Pharisees suffered from Pharisaism; some of that faction or sect or religious congregation hadn't been contaminated and perhaps were even saintly people. Some of them were disciples of Christ. Saul was no hypocrite but on the contrary, bigoted, before he became Paul.

The very word Pharisee adopted a pejorative significance after Christ, just like the word Sophist after Plato. The Sophists were somewhat like our modern "lecturers", like García Sánchiz or Pemán.

The "separated ones", the *Pherishajja*, which is what "pharisee" means, included men like wise Hillel who formulated the Golden Rule, namely that one should not treat others in ways that one would not like to be treated, Gamaliel the Elder, Saint Paul's teacher; Simon, Christ's friend; Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and a number of converts to Christianity with whom Saint Paul would argue later: "Are they Pharisees? So am I!"

The Pharisees were "separated" from the Sadducees; because the latter maintained that the Revelation was only to be found in the written Law or Torah, like Protestants now believe; while the Pharisees added Tradition to the Books. We know from Christ's lips what they did with that oral tradition (which in itself was perfectly justified).

The history of the Pharisees has been clearly recorded by Flavius Josephus many times.

Descendants of the Assideans or *Hasidim*, the legatees of the national-religious theme of Mathathias Maccabee, they later became the "Zealots" or nationalists and the "hit men", something like the Irish Sinn-Féin, so to speak. The Pharisees acquired such consistency that they may be compared to a modern religious congregation, and they exerted such an influence that they considered themselves (quite reasonably) higher up than the priests and the kings: their force stemmed from their knowledge of the Law; that among Theocratic people had the maximum value. Accordingly, Christ puts them in the same basket with the "scribes" who were learned people despite the fact that a Pharisee might not be a "doctor" but only an observant and rigorous person, what these days we would say a prudish person.

That's why Christ didn't incriminate them all in his terrible sermon from Mathew's Chapter XXIII, but added the adjective "hypocrite", that must be understood more like a restrictive relative clause and not so much as a qualifying expression. However, in Christ's time the faction as a whole was reprehensible; and its false puritanical and sanctimonious spirit had already been formulated, written and turned into constitutions and rules of which Christ quoted two: "Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever, thou mightest be profited by me; And honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free" (Math XV:6). In the Talmud you will find dozens of casuistic and legally codified rules of the sort. For instance:

"The words of the Scribes have more value than the words of the Torah."

"The words of the Law include light and serious precepts; but the words of a Scribe are always serious."

"The study of the Torah is more important that the construction of the Temple."

"To study the Torah is greater than to honour father and mother."

"The Law is a higher thing than the priesthood and the royalty."

"The rabble that ignores the Torah is accursed."

"The countrified peasants are not pious and not one rustic fears sin."

"It is a deadly thing to be with the rabble."

"It is allowed to punch anyone of the rabble, even on Saturdays, nay, even on the Saturday of Kippur."

There is no such thing as a society evil to the point that it doesn't include something good in it, nor one so good that it hasn't anyone or anything bad in it; and the same may be said of teachings... Nevertheless, it's not impossible —though sometimes it is something of a tall order—to pass a moral judgment about any society in its entirety, as long as the judgment aims at "the group that sets the trend". Or, as the Schools have it, the "formal" part, that in some cases can be a minority.

An army of lyons commanded by a bunch of dimwits (as Napoleon once said, referring to the Spanish army) is an army of asses; that can, nevertheless, give Napoleon I quite a kicking.

Just because a society is governed by bad men is not enough to make it an evil one. Sometimes it's worse when governed by a fool. The Church wasn't in a bad state during Alexander VI's pontificate; not imitating him and resisting where possible, would do, would be enough. Some saints saved the Church's honour in those circumstances; the King of France, the Spanish bishops, many discontented Italians and poor Savonarola.

But in Christ's times the "minority that sets the trend" was, among the Pharisees, entirely Pharisaical. Accordingly, at the end of his public life, Christ attacked directly the whole sect, after having tirelessly struggled against its religious distortions and bigoted nationalism, with explanations, corrections, arguments and, above all, good example. In the end, he had to resort to the terrible vocabulary of his Forerunner and to the language of all the prophets with their prophetic threats. He knew what he was doing and that he was buying himself trouble, but by now he had predicted his death to his disciples.

*Then spake Jesus to the multitude,*

*and to his disciples, saying:*

*The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:*

*all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do;*

*but do not ye after their works:*

*for they say, and do not.*

*For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne,*

*and lay them on men's shoulders;*

*but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.*

*But all their works they do for to be seen of men:*

*they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,*

*and love the uppermost rooms at feasts,*

*and the chief seats in the synagogues,*

*and greetings in the markets,*

*and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.*

*But be not ye called Rabbi:*

*for one is your Master, even Christ;*

*and all ye are brethren.*

*And call no man your father upon the earth:*

*for one is your Father, which is in heaven.*

*Neither be ye called masters:*

*for one is your Master, even Christ.*

*But he that is greatest among you*

*shall be your servant.*

*And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased;*

*and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

*But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*

*for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men:*

*for ye neither go in yourselves,*

*neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.*

*Woe unto you!*

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*

*for ye devour widows' houses,*

*and for a pretense make long prayer:*

*therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.*

*Woe unto you!*

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*

*for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte;*

*and when he is made, ye make him*

*twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*

*Woe unto you!*

*Woe unto you, ye blind guides!*

*which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing;*

*but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!*

*Ye fools and blind:*

*for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?*

*And, whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing;*

*but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.*

*Ye fools and blind!*

*for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?*

*Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar,*

*sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.*

*And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it,*

*and by him that dwelleth therein.*

*And he that shall swear by heaven,*

*sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.*

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*

*for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin,*

*and have omitted the weightier matters*

*of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith:*

*these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

*Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.*

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*

*for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter,*

*but within they are full of extortion and excess.*

*Thou blind Pharisee,*

*cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter,*

*that the outside of them may be clean also.*

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*

*for ye are like unto whited sepulchres,*

*which indeed appear beautiful outward,*

*but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*

*Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men,*

*but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*

*because ye build the tombs of the prophets,*

*and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,*

*and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers,*

*we would not have been partakers with them*

*in the blood of the prophets.*

*Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves,*

*that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.*

*Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.*

*Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers!*

*how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*

*Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets,*

*and wise men, and scribes:*

*and some of them ye shall kill and crucify;*

*and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues,*

*and persecute them from city to city:*

*that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth,*

*from the blood of righteous Abel*

*unto the blood of Zechari'ah son of Berechi'ah,*

*whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.*

*Verily I say unto you,*

*All these things shall come upon this generation.*

Only Christ, the last and greatest of all the prophets, could pronounce this imprecation and menace them like that. The immediate fate of Jerusalem was before his eyes. So was his own. Christ adds the final prophecy:

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!,*

*who kills the prophets*

*and stones to death those who have been sent to her!*

*How often I wanted to gather your children together*

*as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings,*

*but you people were unwilling!*

The moral portrait of the Pharisees is staggering. It is eternal and cannot be improved. It's the echo—now vested with the maximum authority of poetry, science and the prophetic mission—of an acerbic imprecation directed against the congregation of the Pharisees, pronounced by one of their own some 20 years before and that had been recorded in "The Assumption of Moses", that judaic apokalypse of theirs.

Jesus Christ felt the poison of these people, and by comparison the sensual and unfaithful Saducees almost seem to have been pardoned in his preaching, disdained. Let us not forget that it is to them that he refers to when he talks about "the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost that shall not be forgiven unto men" (Math XII:31), the most terrifying words ever uttered by a human mouth. For the rest, he plainly stated that they were the sons of the devil and that the devil was their father.

*The father of liar*

*Who was a murderer from the beginning.*

How come that this horror could proceed from these people, these abiding, zealous people, dedicated to the study of the Law... it is a difficult thing to specify, but not impossible to conceive. For a start, "casuistry" had made its appearance. All complete codes postulate a certain casuistry, the exercise by which you apply general precepts to particular cases. There's nothing wrong with that, quite the contrary. But casuistry easily degenerates by excess or by distortion: it becomes too tangled, it cuts loose from the law and its spirit, it hollows out and then the devil gets in—an easy thing for him to do, considering that he's "the spirit of emptiness" and is fond of empty trunks (just like bedbugs). In these "cracked cisterns, that can hold no water" as Jeremiah called the Pharisees of his day (II:13), all sorts of weirdos find refuge. In the Pharisaic casuistry, the Talmud, the commentaries of the Law, the tradition of the doctors, one can find here and there some fruit amid the waffle, as in fact it includes collected "sayings" from the prophets and the doctors; but the padding had grown to immense proportions and had contaminated all the rest: "commandments of men" (Tit I:14), "who legislate about the mint and the rue" as Jesus blame them of doing (Luke XI:42); and "nests" and "vases" and "the stems of fruits", who pass laws endlessly regulating the Saturday rest day, on the payment of the tithe and ritual purity: if a priest could celebrate or not after having inadvertently touched a woman's shadow, if a tithe could be exacted from the son of the son of the son of a debtor, if it was permissible to eat on Saturdays from a fruit fallen from a tree. But the fact is that those who are capable of keeping these long-winded and subtle "observances" usually are childish and neurotic characters; and please God that things don’t get to the unfortunate point in which "regular observance" substitutes holiness in a religious community. In that case, anything follows.

"Between one that does not know the Torah and an ass, the ass is better because he doesn't speak." One can imagine this sort of thing by entering a decadent convent's library: loads of handbooks, books of useless devotions, collections of sermons made out of other sermons if not inspired by one of those vacuous and, worse still, noisy cowbell-like commentaries to the Canonical Law Code, tons of hefty volumes of moral and pastoral theology, the works of Saint John of the Cross, of Ricardo León, of Father Coloma and Father Van Tricht under lock and key in the "Light literature" section, incomplete Bibles with littered lives of saints and historic studies of the Founder, a godforsaken jumble covered with dust. Sometimes one can study the stages of decay in a library, just as you do with the ages of the earth by observing its various geological stratums. "From 1899 to 1905 a clever superior was in charge over here," a shrewd librarian once said to me, "and then it was over." "Do they actually teach philosophy over here?" he later said, "for we cannot find a single set of complete works by any philosopher; only handbooks and books of rebuttals."

Into this emptiness of Pharisaical casuistry, religious conceit is the first to get in; afterwards the idea of a political Messiah makes its way, and finally pride settles in, the mother of untruthfulness and cruelty.

The only ones who could keep all the law were those who knew it; and to know it completely took a lifetime: but that was the best thing in the world. "The Torah is greater than priesthood and royalty, because priesthood has 24 requirements, royalty 30; but you only reach the Torah after 48." The priests were overwhelmed by an ever more complex ritual and had abandoned the study of the Law to the laity, becoming, in the main, liturgical professionals, in other words, keen sellers of magic ceremonies. These constituted good business for this life, but the Torah gave science, wisdom, holiness and eternal salvation. With good reason the Pharisee prayed: "I thank thee, for I am not as other men are... as this publican." (Luke XVIII:11). Because "the pagan that approaches the study of the Torah should be put to death."

One gathers that religious conceit gave way to political Messiahship. The Pharisees needed to avenge their scorching humiliations, retaliate on account of their tumbles and defeats. They felt religion humiliated and were convinced that a Messiah would vindicate their religion. And if the Messiah was to be a politician, they had to prepare for his coming by delving into politics, naturally. One hundred years before Christ, the Pharisees waged war against King Alexandre Jannaeus, a six-year affair that cost 50.000 victims; during the following reign of Queen Salome Alexandra, they were the true rulers, if Josephus is to be believed. The Saducees were pitilessly dominated. They sought refuge among the great priestly families, flattering the powerful. The Pharisees counted with some popularity, above all among pious women, and constituted a numerous, fearsome and meddling tribe.

When religion lets politics in, a strange corruption takes place. In such circumstances power becomes a fearsome thing for it can constrain consciences. With a religious injunction Caiphas forced Christ to "blaspheme" in such a way that it cost him his life, to wit: that he was "the Son of Man" to which Daniel had referred. Corruption reaches its highest degree when religion is reduced to a mere instrument and becomes a pretext for political purposes. "You love the chief seats in the synagogues… and love greetings in the markets" (Luke XX:46)—Christ imprecated them. Before cruelty turns up, one must begin by being hard-hearted. But even before that, one must be religiously conceited. It is cruel enough to go around "devouring widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers" (Mark, XII:40); but the cruelty of the Pharisees that showed up in Christ's Passion usually was attested by the banishing or murder of their enemies, this was almost always played out through secret cunning stratagems. They didn't want to jeopardize the title of "Most Sage and Holy Doctor" which was how they expected to be addressed. Christ cancelled that in one whack when he said: "There is none good but one, that is, God. Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ."

The politics of the Pharisees immediately becomes evident. At the beginning of his second year of preaching, when his first trip to Jerusalem (as Mathew, Mark and Luke unanimously record) "the Pharisees and the Herodians took counsel against him, how they might destroy him". To eliminate him was a settled question, but not how. Weren't the Pharisees and Herodians enemies? So they were, but then, only political enemies, the sort that readily agree when a non-political opponent appears, the kind that upsets the two-party system, one of those who disturb the "free play of the democratic institutions" like they say nowadays. The agreement was quite successful: to eliminate him in such a manner that they themselves wouldn't look bad, concurrently avoiding popular commotion; and those in charge of executing the plan were the most religious, naturally: the Pharisees.

So there they were, partying and making great speeches, flattering and sweet-talking to each other, exciting everybody in defense of religion against the Saducee ungodliness, which amounted to nothing but to defend the Pharisees themselves: withdrawn men, hard-hearted, ruthless, narrow-minded, hostile to life and beauty; prying all over the place, prideful people, resentful, starry-eyed, grovelling, shrewd, devious, grim; ostentatious, obtuse, cheeky, conceited, bumptious, godforsaken people, feared by men as the Gospel shows; leading a whole nation to a complete catastrophe, their people doomed to fall with them owing to that mysterious social solidarity that makes nations have bad leaders (things that happen only when they’re possible). The peasants of Galilee and the fishermen and the simple artisans were like "sheep without a shepherd"; but the people of the cities and those that determined the social trends had evil shepherds, wolves in sheep's clothing, that went around intoxicating them with lofty verbosity centred on a flattering but entirely false ideal.

Only stagnant waters rots and stinks; maggots only thrive on a dead corpse.

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- VIII -

**With what authority?**

*To proclaim certain truths*

*is a sin in itself.*

(José Hernández, “Martín Fierro”)

The Gospels do not outrightly tell us about the inception and reasons behind the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. They just show Jesus struggling with the lodge from the very beginning. What is more, the cleansing of the Temple creates the impression that Christ is the aggressor. Saint John puts it at the beginning of his Gospel and the Synoptics at the end. When one studies the Gospels closely it appears that the incident repeated itself with a three—year gap in between, or else that this deed of absolute and violent authority took place when the Messiah was beginning his public life, after John's testimony and the miracle at Cana.

It looks like a provocation.

Wasn't Jesus supposed to preach and act in accordance with the religious authorities of Israel and with their consent? That's what nowadays is done in the Church. And even supposing that his supreme Messianic authority, sealed already by the miracle at Cana, did not depend on Caiaphas' legal authority, wouldn't it have been advisable and more polite to obtain the religious chiefs' *placet* or at least give it a try?

A Pharisee could have well said: "What? Is it the case today that anyone can preach the law of Moses as he pleases?; may anyone stir up religious movements among the people and exert an act of authority in the Temple without the consent of the priests or legal directors of our religion? Without the approval of the Doctors who have spent their lives studying the Law?"

But they did not say so; and that alone answers this difficulty. They didn't say so. When the energetic young man armed with a whip burst into the Temple they asked for a sign, in other words, a miracle. Which means that they were perfectly aware of Christ's answer in case they every were to question him: "I've a direct mission from God", something that in Judaic theology required a confirmation by miracles.

But when they request a miracle *ad hoc*, Christ, all through his life, constantly answers in the negative; in this case with a conditional negative that includes a promise and a warning. It contains the promise of a miracle, then a mysterious one, which is his own resurrection; and a forewarning even more distant in time, mentioning the destruction of the Temple, which the Pharisees held as a perfectly indestructible fetish. To Jewish ears this answer resonated like a thunderclap. The destruction of the Temple! Raise it up in three days! What a way of speaking!

The answer itself was obscure and brilliant, *pregnans*. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," means lots of things. I have the power to make miracles and will do so when convenient. This Temple can be destroyed and as it happens you yourselves are destroying it by outrageously converting it into a marketplace. I have received direct authority from God, my Father...”. When at his trial they reproached him for having said this they took good care to slightly alter it: "This one has said: I shall destroy the Temple..." when in fact what he had said was: "Destroy this Temple..." or more precisely, "Continue to destroy it and..." which in good grammar is what the imperative aorist of the verb *lyo* means. This shows that they perfectly understood the charge of devastating religion, symbolized by the Temple, contained in the cryptic and unexpected answer.

Christ would have acted equivocally and would have shown himself to be dishonest had he requested permission to preach to Caiaphas; something equivalent to challenging his own authority. In other words, he would have lied, showing that he was not the Messiah, making his supreme authority depend on another legal authority and subordinating himself to it. All the more after John the Baptist's public testimony, to which at first he implicitly referred, and later, explicitly evoked.

The Pharisees knew perfectly well that this testimony qualified Christ's claim to authority. John the Prophet had undeniably singled him out as the one who had been Secularly Waited For. Christ had accepted the testimony and had begun to act in consequence. A certain supernatural decency and divine modesty shines in the course of this mysterious beginning of campaign.

Conversely, with John the Pharisees indeed proceeded with what was obviously called for and set up an inquest to find out with what authority he preached and baptized. Not that in those days preaching required regular "licenses" as is now the case, for any Israelite was free to exhort his brothers, could go about the towns as a traveling preacher of the Law and its commentaries and improvise on his own authority what today we would call sermons, recitations in oral style—that are not at all like our sermons—and finally, interpret the Prophets for the people that assembled every Saturday at the Synagogues. No. That was a perfectly normal pursuit, free from restrictions of any kind, a simple intellectual exercise, comparable if you will with our poets and philosophers.

But John had violently denounced and rebuked the religious abuses of his day. To whom was he referring when he spoke of a "generation of vipers that would not be able to flee from the wrath to come"? And what could possibly be that "axe laid unto the root of the trees"? The allusion to the Pharisees and the Messianic reference were unmistakable. Besides, John received the confession of sins and baptized, as yet formless rites which simply symbolized the "metanoia", the change of heart that made possible God's pardon and predisposed men to welcome the Great New Words.

And so they question the abrasive prophet from Makeron trying to establish if he is the Messiah, or else Elijah that was to precede him, or perhaps another prophet. No. All right then, with what authority? His authority is a reflection. His authority proceeds from the Supreme Authority of someone else to come immediately after himself, whom he shall recognize by a miraculous sign that has been revealed to him, after which, he will indicate him for everyone to see; and having done so, he finds it suitable to "decrease so the Other one increases", to disappear following the walks of martyrdom once his mission is accomplished.

Oh the bloody head on a silver plate delivered to the danseuse! The diademed debased gaffer is the responsible for his death and the reason for it was because of a public reproach prompted by his scandalous union with his sister-in-law. But who were the tattlers that went to him with the gossip and spurred him on, encouraging the cowardly man—a puppet king, flabby and supersticious? That's not difficult to guess. The Pharisees were not liable to pardon or to forget the thunderous denunciation of this race of vipers that abused religion and had lost all fear of God's Judgement. "These people proceed as if God does not exist", said John of the Cross in his time.

So even as Christ begins his mission with the sweetest of miracles he's already under rancorous, spiteful and murderous eyes. At this point these sanctimonious people consider him as no more than a rejoinder and a successor to the other hated demagogue, if anything a more daring and wriggly one, one gifted with more attractive methods of seduction. Not by any stretch of the imagination were they going to comply with their strictly religious and professional duty, namely, to present themselves at the scene recognize the miracle and humbly ask the thaumaturge who was he and what were they expected to do: exactly what the poor people did with John, moved only by his penitence and preaching, by the magnetic personality and appearance of one who could not but be a prophet. Quite on the contrary, what immediately follows is the accusation of "heretic": he teaches to infringe the Sabbath, something clearly against the Law of Moses. No one presses charges on account of what happened at the Temple, never mind the violence and uproar prompted by the circumstances. Naturally: the scene was edifying for the people, and they themselves had bad consciences because of this business of the rabble that trafficked in merchandise dishonouring the Atrium. But the other accusation was more specious. Christ quietly ignored the Pharisees' ridiculous casuistry referred to the Sabbath: they had conflated their idle discussions and oral traditions with the inspired and written Torah to the point that that thick foliage, the tiresome and dried up case-by-case morality, not only had identified itself with the trunk, but had all but obliterated it. "Do you not lay hold of a sheep and lift it out of a pit on the Sabbath day?" And to cure a woman with a word or without any words amounted to work on the Sabbath.

Wherever you find regulations in excess, a proliferation of mandates, rules, mores, explanatory notes, rigid formalities and so on, there's not only the danger of forgetting the spirit and end of the law—it is in itself the sign that the spirit has given in. And so three possible things easily happen: the fool may appear to be an expert, the hypocrite will look like a saint and an innocent person may end up condemned. With good reason Martín Fierro distrusts the law—in other words the "proceedings"—as soon as a world of pettifogging lawyers substitute the patriarchal and personal way of doing justice (like Juan Manuel de Rosas' did in his time): behind the Proceedings he can hazard dark intentions moving against him that will send him to prison in no time, along with his men and son.

Since the very moment that Christ is judged to be a heretic he is doomed. Afterwards, by and by, and as the envy and fury increases before his achievements, a succession of invectives will be thrown at him: madman, magician, possessed by the devil; and later on: blasphemer, seditious and finally conspirator against Caesar. Whatever. It is an accusation that grows on its own as time goes by without no one demanding the guilty party for explanations in his defense; on the contrary each explanation will only be turned into another accusation. The proceedings are secret. When the judges appear in public it is not an accusation anymore, but a sentence. They assert slanderously and try to catch out the convicted person in one or another unfortunate turn of words to make the mud stick.

One witnesses increasingly the slow fermentation of the slander in the people, now and then repealed and stopped in their tracks by the defendant's brilliant blows; and the expansion of two parties. But the conflict's real linchpin, "This man cannot be the Messiah because he doesn't look like the Messiah we expect", is never discussed: because the ambitious cannot reveal where his feuds lie deep within: it would amount to openly expose his ambitions. Neither could Christ do it directly, except by his deeds; however, he neves ceases to tell them that if they do not recognize him it's because the Father hadn't delivered them to him, because their pride had blinded them to the light and shut off the prophecies; to the point that it was useless to argue with them. In fact, if a man were to raise from the dead with the deliberate intention of testifying to the truth, they wouldn't believe him.

All things considered, we are witnessing a real religious authority that resists a higher religious authority; in this case, the supreme one, undeniable and overwhelming; so the expression "resisted the Holy Ghost" is not exaggerated. The clash between priests and prophets was not unknown in the Old Testament, for instance the prophets Hosea and Malachias record such incidents; and we know from Christ's own lips that these fights sometimes culminated with the prophet's murder. With good reason Saint Paul recommends that those gifted with "charisma" must respect one another and learn to get along; but only charity and true humility are capable of achieving such a thing. If those gifted with the charisma of the "shepherd", to wit, directors and organizers, come to believe that they see it all, that they know all things and are capable of anything... well, that will induce them to hate the Prophet, which is by definition the man who sees, the seer. And so, they become dim-sighted and finally "blind leaders of the blind". That is why, one will say:

*Do not kill the prophets*,

I address myself to you, you priests: their charismas do not deny.

They hold the drumsticks,

and see things, and call them by their name.

May God protect us from asses and their kicks

And from men that believe themselves to be gods.

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- IX -

**The women**

The Pharisees despised women; and yet, they played a great part among them.

Someone could say that it's natural, especially if he has read his Nietzsche: "Are you dealing with women? Don't forget your whip!".

It is little known but entirely true that Nietzsche forgot his whip every time he dealt with women; moreover, he didn't even have one. That's precisely why he wrote that. Tell me what you brag about and I'll tell you what you lack.

The truth is that the Pharisees defended women, even though that went indirectly against the naturally brutal customs and the looseness of the Saducees standards (at least at the school of Hillel) where the relative stability of marriage was at stake.

That must have been the reason. They were the champions of regularity and of "conveniences"; and women need more of that than men.

In religious matters the Pharisees were the representatives of orthodoxy and observance. I'm not sure that as a rule women are more religious than men; but they are obviously more pious.

One always finds lots of pious women; and, in some cases, they are powerful.

That must be the key to what Josephus says, that the people followed the Pharisees "and especially the women". Because, on the other hand, the records clearly show, never mind Josephus, that the sect displayed an arrogant disdain towards them.

The Talmud itself records the dispute or talmudic question about the pureness or not of the priest who passed so closely to a woman that her shadow touched him, (in other words if, after that, he could celebrate or not).

But the best record of all is found in the Gospels: the scene of the woman taken in adultery by barking lunatics armed with stones who drag her like a frightened animal and make her appear before Jesus Christ; Simon's disdain towards "This one, who calls himself a prophet" for allowing the Magdelene to weep over his feet; and perhaps even more revealing, how the disciples marveled to find him talking to a woman: "They marveled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?"

And yet, lots of women began to follow Jesus with devotion, selflessly and modestly; even when in certain cases, like in Magdalene's, they did what they could. And even this might have increased their hate. As we know by experience, jealousy is not impossible (even among religious people) on account of the feminine clientele. "This man deals with Publicans and prostitutes."

This saying, "he deals with prostitutes" is evidently a case of hyperbole and exaggeration suggesting something like "he deals with women; with all of them; with any kind."

Resentment too, unfailingly appears in the "pious" woman that to her dismay finds that she's not distinguished by the prophet and is treated in much the same way as the rest; Christ dealt with them all as sisters. "What's the matter with this man? Is he out of his mind?". The scene in Nazareth where they try to prevent him from going out because "he's a bit delicate-indisposed", echoes in itself a feminine piece of tidbit and parental worry.

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In 1951 Castellani wrote this piece for a prestigious Buenos Aires magazine (*Dinámica* Social, nº 13-14). The fact that nearly 70 years ago he wrote that *“all this that’s now happening to us, cannot be much more than a common cold that will necessarily heal”* might be just a coincidence. But while I translated it into English, I couldn’t quite forget that I was quarantined and the better part of the world was under lockdown…

The current from a religious point of view

*At all times you must exert yourself as if this world were to last forever;*

*and yet, you must never forget that this world* willnot *last forever.*

This apparently contradictory or even impossible mindset has been the watchword of every religious soul living throughout all great historical crisis, starting with St Paul’s *Epistle to the Thessalonians* right up to the disposition taken up by faithful people nowadays—Hilaire Belloc, for instance, comes to mind.

Both assertions seem irreconcilable; and so they would be, were it not for Faith, that mysterious catalytic. However, the pragmatic value of this somewhat apocalyptic attitude can be appreciated even by agnostics, a talented positivist, for example.

That’s why we haven’t been in two minds when we decided (with no shortage of efforts and risks, in the middle of the uncertainties and tribulations that come with these times) to publish an essay on the Book of Revelations that more than one shallow critic will undoubtedly disqualify as “pessimist”.

Well, it is pessimism of course, but then, a constructive one.

Like all mystics, one could think of Saint Paul as a somewhat delirious man, even when extremely practical. He preached very sharply in Thessalonica on the Mystery of Iniquity already underway which he saw transparently, as it were, through the vast Roman Empire that cruelly oppressed Christians. Now, he described it in so poignant terms that the Thessalonians decided not to work anymore seeing that the End of Times was just round the corner. And then the hot-headed man from Tarsus writes to them once more, correcting them: the End of Times will arrive, Christ himself stated that, but of that hour and day no one knows; it cannot be now, immediately, because we can see how He-Who-Restrains (the *Katejón* in Greek) still stands; so if any would not work, neither should he eat.

This same practical attitude can be found in Saint Vincent Ferrer, Peter Oliva and all the prophets; like good physicians, they smell death on its way and yet continue the treatment and try to heal their patients.

*Morituri te salutant.*

Faith has this paradoxical temperament. Faith assures Christians that this *aión*, this cycle of Creation will End one day; and that before that it shall be preceded by a tremendous agony and then followed by a splendid reconstruction; or, to put it in religious terms, that *“Christ will come back one day to place his enemies to be made his footstool and to take effective possession of the Kingdom of Heaven, now transferred to earth…”*. That’s how the Text has it, this enormity is not my fault.

This final *agony,* in the sense of supreme battle, belongs to the dogmatic and mythological heritage of every religion you can think of; and in the case of Christianity, has been announced and depicted—by Daniel the Prophet, in Christ’s eschatological sermon and in the final book of the Bible, the Book of Revelations or *Apocalypse—*and that, in no uncertain terms, the whole thing painted with the most vigorous colors and powerful features that defy comparison with any other human utterance from the beginning of all times.

*By a deep psychological paradox, this pessimistic literature has sustained Christianity’s constructive optimism.*

In the times in which the Church lived in fear, when fire and brimstone preachers were announcing the “imminent Second Coming” were precisely the times in which Christians built huge cathedrals and undertook desperate ventures; you know: Saint Paul’s times, Saint Augustin’s, the times of Gregory the Great, Hildebrand, Joaquín da Fiore, Odo of Cluny, Vincent Ferrer. It might be said that the waiting for the End of Times (that a capricious legend assigned to the year one thousand), has been present without interruption in the Christian conscience all through the Middle Ages; and the Middle Ages constructed this Western Civilization (that nowadays everybody presume is done for, while the masons still defend it).

This accepted image of apocalyptic catastrophes helped the faithful to overcome their contemporary disasters; which is, all things considered, quite logical; or, perhaps better said, psycho-logical. One nail removes another. It’s the same cathartic characteristic of tragedy that Aristotle taught us.

When the immense trials and tribulations belonging to History’s drama, overwhelming man and his paltry rationalism, get to a point in which they exceed his therapeutic powers and surpass his comprehension—which is the case, these days—only the Faithful possess the talisman of staying calm and peacefully continue their work, which is no other than that expressed by the poet:

*A terrible optimist*

*is he who nothing expects.*

*And he who has given all,*

*he who has nothing to lose,*

*will never be afraid of burglar or thief.*

When the world’s very foundations begin to fail and the whole structure seems to founder (like what happened, for example, in the fourteenth century)—that is when the sensible man takes to his Book of Revelations and says: *“All this has been foreseen and much more. Beware! But after all these things pass, a definite victory awaits. The world must die. Even if it has come through a lot of illnesses, one of them will be the final one. But, the soul of the world, like that of man, is not a mortal thing”.*

This magazine of ours is not about Theology, but science and social philosophy instead; and yet, pondering religiously about the current times is not out of place; in fact, quite the contrary, seeing that religion is one of the most powerful engines (the first mover) that drives all things, including politics and the economy. If man has no idea of *where he’s heading for*, he doesn’t move; or if he does, there comes a time when his *motus* ceases to be human and becomes nothing more than a convulsion.

Once the people of the Western world lost most of the ferment provided by the Christian truths, and, what was worse, when those truths were partly falsified and converted into the *fermentum pharijeorum* (the leaven of the Pharisees), modern man and modern thinking dissociated and turned upside down the two terms of the Christian rule; so nowadays two unorthodox opinions (opposed to one another), one ecstatic, and the other, ominous, call the shots and dominate the *air du temps*:

1. We know the world can never end.
2. It’s useless, nobody can do absolutely nothing.

Our patient reader will easily find these two stances expressed one way or another by his neighbors or members of his family (and perhaps even find something of this in himself), and when upset or under the weather for some reason or other he might find his mind taking turns in a pendular fashion—to no avail. To exemplify this with literary or philosophical references is easy enough.

*The Decline of the West,* from Vico’s school of thought, has given a title for a great philosophical and prophetic book, as well as much food for thought: Spengler documented with superb learning the *Thessalonian* mood: our civilization has run out of steam, has reached a kind of senile exhaustion and suffers from a cancer of sorts, against which little can we do. René Guénon, Louis Klages, Benedetto Croce and other lesser authors are on the same page here. They describe with dark colors the Western crisis, they uncompromisingly declare that this world is terminally ill and point out how its conservative and vital forces are being depleted, even its religious energies. In the melancholic end to his great book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson seems to play the role of a doctor that makes a mistake and instead of writing the prescription he intended, he actually extends a death certificate.

The other perspective, one of foolish euphoria, is more common—and more cowardly: it is the illusion of Indefinite Progress typical of the Nineteenth Century, extended and disproportionately amplified, in the works of, say, Toynbee, Wells or Bernard Shaw… The world has lived already for hundreds of millions of years and therefore will continue to live for hundreds of centuries more. None of these premises can be proved; but all the same, they believe in them like Truths of Holy Writ. As a result, all this that’s now happening to us, cannot be much more than a common cold that will necessarily heal, giving way to a healthier organism, a more robust and marvelous condition as compared to before, and all that with the paradisiacal splendors of “the atomic age” in full swing. *“These are not agonizing pains, these are birth pains”,* they say. Superman is about to be born, along with the Super Federation of the Nations of the World and the total palingenesis of the whole visible Universe by virtue of Modern Science. This idea, or image, or myth if you like, pervades our environment, it is widespread to the point that one frequently stumbles on it, stated implicitly or explicitly, in an applied manner or purely expressed, as a formulated contention or as part of a show, with sublime or foolish variations, the great Hope of the Modern World appears even in silly magazines and American comics where the Argentine children learn… religion! (maybe more than in the Salesian Catechisms they read at school). Indeed, this image of Unity, that is to say, the UN and the UNESCO, have already come into religious effect.

They already have their great theoretician, their Divine and their prophet: Fr Teilhard de Chardin, the celebrated Parisian man of science, from the French and English Academies of Science, a columnist for both the respected magazines *Études* and the renowned *Revue del Questions Scientifiques*: undoubtedly a great man and a great writer.

In some twenty short essays (published without the mandatory ecclesiastical *imprimatur,* not even from the Jesuits), some of them printed in mimeographs in China or Japan, that are quite popular and that have spread in France, Spain, Italy and are not entirely unknown in our country, the anthropologist discoverer of *Homo Pekinensis* unveils a new theology, a brilliant and seductive one, that could well be called “Neo-Catholicism”… Neocatholicism? Yes, sir: a Neocatholicism designed to worship man. This is no place to study it, nor could we properly expose it for lack of space.

Suffice it to say that starting from Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*, assuming Darwinist evolutionary theory as a given and permeated by an atmosphere of modernist theological ideas (total naturalization of the Divine, Baius’ error) he springs upon us a vast and swollen new Dogmatic Theology construct, under the guise of primitive dogmas, with a prophet’s eloquence and poignancy, as if he were really possessed by “The Spirit of the Earth”—as he likes to say—that we others prefer to designate as the *Cosmological Eros,* or, better still, *The Prince of this World.*

His speculations concentrate especially on a triumphant unification of the Universe, to which, as he wants it, all the nations of the world will infallibly run to under the attraction of the “Universal Christ” who would absorb the entire Universe immanently—all that because he has Incarnated Himself in it from the moment of its very Creation and is its proper *élan vital*, as it were; and from this “Universal Christ” the historical Christ called Jesus of Nazareth was no more than an avatar, a representation, a fleeting visible epiphany. What specific form will this “Universal Christ” or “Soul of the World” adopt while buried in Creation and is no less than its life, has not been indicated by our hierophant, but of one thing he’s sure, and that would be the great fusion of the peoples of the world in a single melting pot—and, naturally, the attainment of an Ecumenical Revival. The enthusiasm, poignancy and religious verve with which Teilhard de Chardin’s soul encourages this essential summary of all and every modern heterodoxy is amazing. Only to read him and you get sick; but at least it tells you a lot, if you’re a theologian.

Anything international is essentially religious. Instinctively, man hates or fears any foreigner and his reason cannot exceed his “language” (from his clan, tribe, nation or race) unless under the pressure of a religious feeling: the thesis that Bergson established quite clearly in his *Les deux sources.*

To say this is to say that nowadays everything that is international must be Catholic or Jewish. Those two are the only universal religions. Masonry is a Jewish invention, islamism is a Jewish heresy.

But, to to start with, the union of nations in great groups, and later, the fusion of them all into one unique world Empire (a powerful dream and a great movement in these times), cannot be done unless with Christ or against Christ. That construct that only God can pull off—and who will, at the end, do so, as we have been promised, and as we believe—the modern world passionately wants to achieve without God; falling away from Christ, loathing the primitive sketch of unity that was once known as Christianity while tightly oppressing human nature while trying to suppress families and nations.

But we shall defend up to the very end those natural plots of humanity, those original cores; with our war cry which is not so much about overcoming, but about not being overcome. This is to say that in knowing that we will be beaten in this fight, that’s the major triumph; because if the world comes to its end, then what Christ said, was true. And in that manner, the end is a token of the Resurrection.

*You must be a dreamer,*

*If you want to catch this hare…*

If you look carefully, the hound runs slower than the hare; and if nowadays the hounds catch the hares, that is because of a Dreaming Hound, that in prehistory *kept running notwithstanding the fact that he could see he was losing ground.* The rest of the hounds gave up and said to themselves: *“What a naïve hound if ever there was one!”* and afterwards couldn’t believe their eyes when they saw it coming back with the hare in its mouth, and thus discovered that the hare is the faster animal, but a less resistant one.

The devil is a fast animal. But we, the dreamers, we who fear the Devil, Antichrist and the Scarlet Harlot, will save the world, provided that God’s world deserves to be saved.

\*

In 1959 Fr. Castellani published a book of reflections on Christ’s Parables (*Las Parábolas de Cristo*, Buenos Aires, 1959, Itinerarium, 345 pp.) with a very short Prologue explaining his intent. We have translated that small piece and one of his exegetical masterpieces. (We take these two writings from a second edition of the book, Buenos Aires, 1994, Jauja, pp. 15-16 and pp. 227-237).

Jesus’ Parables: a short introduction

The parables of Jesus include his popular teachings; along with his theological discourses (very different from our theological sermons), his blessings and curses, and his prophecies; even when all of that results in a unified and single meaningful lesson.

His was the “oral style”; these parables do not belong to a written book.

In one of our books we have established the genre pertaining to parables: they are like transcendent or theological apologues. One could perfectly say that Christ invented and concluded this particular genre: even allowing for some precedents or feeble imitations. They are not fables, they are not normal apologues, they are not legends, they are not pieces of advice or councils, they are not novels, they are not epic poems; they are symbolic poems. Menéndez y Pelayo says that “fables belong to a puerile and prosaic genre”; the parable is of a puerile and poetic type.

The parables of Christ amount to 120 if you count those that begin with sayings like: *“It is like…”* or something similar; that perhaps would be better translated as *“It is on a par…”*; because actually the spiritual realities to which they refer are not really *similar* (and that explains why lots of parables suffer from rather inhuman distortions, literary improbabilities or over the top “exaggerations”, so to say), but more precisely, they are *analogou*s expressions… on a loftier plane.

The spiritual realities to which the parables refer to, are, if you observe them closely, unique. The parables themselves can be divided in those dealing with Christ Himself (The Good Shepherd), about the Kingdom of God (The bidden to the wedding banquet) and also those referred to his Enemies (The cursing of the fig tree). But these three instances add up to only one thing: Christ’s spiritual reality; God on earth and God’s planet, the planet of a God who made it all.

Lots of metaphors and comparisons adorn the Gospel, like, for example, “Let the dead bury their dead”. They are, as it were, seeds of parables. But here we’ll only refer to those fully developed, even those which only add up to four lines, which usually begin with the formula I’ve just mentioned. There is also in the Gospel “parables in action”—all the miracles, for example.

The most important rule in pedagogy and literature is that one must teach about unknown things using known ones; the most important theological rule teaches us that we know God “through visible things, understanding them” as Saint Paul once said. These rules converge in this simple, primitive, profound and original genre. The customs and the circumstances imposed them and a certain Genius transfigured them.

In Greek, “parable” means “tossing a thing next to another”, and from here proceeds the Spanish word “palabra” (just like in Italian “parola” and “parla”, and in French “parole”, in English “palaver”, in German “parole” and “pároli”) but in Greek it doesn’t mean “word” anymore, the Latin “verb” with its special significance was lost in Spanish. In Greek, it doesn’t run like “putting something next to another” but rather something like “tossing” them together: it’s not the same, they are on different levels.

Other parable’s characteristics have been explained by me in another book, the one where I deal with Jesus Christ’s Gospel, but that’s not here nor there.

The strong man’s house

*No man can enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods,*

*except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house* (Mark, III:27)*.*

When Christ’s miracles became unanswerable to the point that denying them would’ve been quite useless, the Pharisees accused him of pulling them off by arts of black magic: that he expelled the demons by means of the very demons, and even that He himself was possessed: “He hath un unclean spirit!” (Mark, III:30).

Christ patiently and elegantly refuted this new allegation with the parable of the Divided Kingdom that we have already seen. He posed a dilemma to them: “If a kingdom (pay attention to this word), is divided against itself, that house cannot stand, and in that case the devil’s kingdom is finished: if the case were that I expel Satan with Satan’s power, it would be necessary that his kingdom be divided, like a nation suffering a civil war; but if I cast him out with my own authority, then he has been vanquished. And so it is, since *no one can enter into a strong man’s house and spoil his goods.* He depicts the devil as one of those petty Oriental kings that lived in luxury in their fortified palaces, protected by guards and troops: to take the Palace’s spoils, as was usual in their wars, first of all it was necessary to challenge it.

But in his parable he added something more to the simple refutation *ad hominem*; he said that the devil on earth was “the Strong Man”, and that he was defending his house; this is to say that the devil was strongly fortified on earth; and that He, Christ, had come to vanquish and disarm him. Christ called him, without exaggerating, without doubt, the Strong One, the Prince of this World, the “Power” or King of Darkness; and he felt that power in himself. Saint Augustin always explained the mystery of Redemption of man in these terms: because of sin, the devil acquired deadly power over Adam and the human race; and afterwards lost it because he wanted to give death unjustly to a man without sin. Christ’s Passion was a battle in which the “Stronger One”, whom to all intent and purposes seemed the “Weaker One”, despoiled the Stronger One’s house: *ce Prince à la tête ecrasée,* as Bloy once put it*.*

The devil is powerful. The devil has made man as we now see him. The devil has brought about God’s greatest feat: Redemption; and very probably he contributed to Creation in one way or another.

“The world is devil’s Heaven” says Victor Delhez shrewdly; this planet where he can work and which he rules (*all these things are mine, and I give them to whom I want to*). In Hell he cannot change anything; but down here he can.

“One of the two: or the devil is not as formidable as they say, or else God is not Omnipotent”—this is a thought that undermines modern people’s thinking; because their Faith has cooled down; and for that matter, even their belief in the devil has weakened too, albeit to a lesser extent. As history teaches us, a religion’s dying breath is the worship of Satan. And we wish we hadn’t had a glimpse of this. In Buenos Aires there are people who celebrate “Black Masses”. You don’t believe it? I know it for a fact.

Contemplating what’s wrong with the world, some people give up hope and end up believing that the devil is the Stronger One; for instance, take that clever novelist, storyteller and drama writer who was Somerset Maugham (and who is so popular these days); the bottom line of all his works is this idea that “evil is more powerful than anything else”.

In the equally distinguished works of that Yankee poet, O. Henry, one can sense the latent idea that when all is said and done the devil cannot do much. Perhaps neither of these two great artists actually know much about this; and if I do, it doesn’t mean that I’m more talented than them.

Due to their unbelief in God and in the Devil, or perhaps because they entertain a false idea of God, a whole lot of our contemporaries have settled down to “naturalism” which is, as I have already said, a pertinacious heresy (a “natural” one if you will), and old as the hills; nowadays thriving and extant.

Against such beliefs, call them however you like, Christ declared that the devil exists, that he may wound men even with diseases if he wishes, and that he has his feet very much on the ground; and that He only, and nobody else, can handle him. Basically, He taught us that man doesn’t live in a “natural” world but in another, special world, the “supernatural” one. Maybe it would be more comfortable for us all to live in a purely natural world, like the Pagans of old did, just like Mars inhabitants do in C.S. Lewis’s novel *Out of the Silent Planet;* but we don’t live in Mars, and Mars is uninhabited anyway.

Henry the Yankee shows in his novels that he’s a superbly clever writer, and yet, believe it or not, his successor Fredrick Brown is even better. It’s a pity that he had to make a living for himself entertaining somewhat slow-witted people, dumb folk prone to put their shirt on the “natural” horse. So, to cut a long story short, if man is only a natural being, then the Good is natural, and the Bad something accidental and artificial; or else, the other way round.

Henry (a.k.a. W. Sidney Porter) was a man with a good heart, and he chose (was forced to choose) Goodness as a natural thing, whereas he considered Evil inexistent: a theological thesis that incensed Schopenhauer.

To my mind, Henry represents the people of U.S. in a much better way than long-haired Walt Whitman. The U.S. really is a remarkable country; not in the sense that our broadcast journalists mean when they say Argentina is a great country, here we mean something absolutely different… luckily for them.

Man is made up of two mismatches, unsteadily balanced.

Those who examine Christian doctrine on man (and who accept it as divinely revealed) tilted as it is towards “paradoxes”, will find that God has healed one unbalance with another one, pulling vigorously in the opposite direction: just as you would with a lopsided tree. That is how the Church, created by gentle Jesus, comes into the world with a warlike mien: a “militant” Church. *I come not to send peace, but a sword*.

Every modern doctrine (all equally Christian heresies), are based on the “natural man”; and they basically fail because the natural man doesn’t exist.

The optimists like Rousseau believe that man is “naturally good”. The pessimists like Schopenhauer believe that he is “naturally bad”. But the crude truth is that man is naturally… nothing. They’re speculating on a condition that never existed anyway, man in a pure state of nature, which is no more than a theological presupposition that historically never existed. Since God created man, he elevated him to a supernatural order; why, I do not know: because He wanted to. For my money, he could have created Mars’ residents (if they exist, except that I don’t think so) in a pure state of nature, just like the theological novelist Lewis imagines them.

Even the Pagan sages of old intuitively knew this and you can find its stamp at the bottom of Greek philosophy: Aristotle said it: “man is an unnatural animal”.

Of course, trying to substantiate anything with this modern speculation about nothing at all (“the natural man”), things like liberalism, will eventually collapse; or else it ends up laying the foundations of perfectly inhuman states such as the communist ones.

*One’s Self I Sing,* is a poem Walt Whitman wrote, and a Yankee composed a cantata based on this poem and called it *An American Creed*.(Francis Cardinal Spellman, the Archbishop of New York, also wrote a bestseller with that title). Both of them (I’m not including the Archbishop) celebrate something that doesn’t exist: “the natural man”, who appears to be good, an upright fellow; except when he turns to his Black or Indian neighbors… and kills them…

“One’s Self I sing”, “I sing to modern man”, “I hear (North) America singing”, “For You O Democracy”, “I Sing the Body Electric” are some of W. Whitman’s poems collected in a single book, *Leaves of Grass*: of which *One’s Self I Sing* (the song about myself) include 52 ecstatic and megalomaniac parts, with 1220 verses, or whatever: because they don’t look like verses. Here are some examples:

*Americanos! conquerors! marches humanitarian!*

*Foremost! century marches! Libertad! masses!*

*For you a programme of chants.*

Naturally, he doesn’t represent *all* of America, thank God. This is one of your typical false prophets so popular these days… but admittedly Whitman is one of the more disheveled ones (and thick-haired also, for good measure); with some poetic skill, mind you, I’ll give you that.

He sings in his informal and barbaric report to the “natural man”; I won’t mention here why he didn’t sing to the “natural woman”. As bad as this or even worse (albeit a bit more reasonable) is to consider men as wolves (“Man is the wolf of man”, *homo hómini lupus*) or, on the contrary, like all of them being saints (“Man is basically a good fellow; it is society that corrupts him”), when as a matter of fact what we observe happens to be an embedded being, a mongrel of sorts. It’s funny, but human nature actually looks rather like those compounded beings that comes down to us from the Greek mythology, centaurs, fauns and mermaids, not to mention the demi-gods, Hercules and Theseus; or the demi-devils, like the Titans.

Pascal once said: “Man is neither angel nor beast, and unhappily whoever wants to act the angel, acts the beast.” But if they would have asked him if there is not in man’s nature a descent as it were towards animality, and at the same time an angelical graft in him, he would’ve answered in the positive on both counts, that yes, so it is; and that was the Christian way of considering man as a whole: that saints have grafts of God in them, and diabolical people grafts of the devil himself; and that we all of us have a bit of this and a bit of the other in very different degrees.

The Original Fall and Redemption through grace (something we could consider practically artificial if you think of it) are the two opposite poles of the Christian doctrine, and each one of them is a mystery in itself *sensu propio*; that is to say, that when a human intellect assumes that he understands them, he actually destroys himself. He is compelled to accept these mysteries blindly (as they have been revealed to us by God) and begin to reason from there, something that, by the way, we’re doing right now. These are Religion’s two boundaries, the frontiers of any real Religion.

To illustrate this, let’s consider *virginity*, that complete novelty belonging to Christianity. God decided to be born from a virgin, and from then on the Church has preached that voluntary virginity is a superior state compared to marriage. That’s a fact. But what can it mean?

To become a man, God avoided the marital act as something heinous; and yet, He Himself invented it, and in when in the Eden garden he declared it to be a good thing.

The marital act is the means by which men and women achieve generation and birth, two excellent things; now, because of that, the necessary means for such results can never be deemed bad. However, the Church advises to relinquish that goal, which is a good thing, while avoiding the means, as if that instrument happened to be something horribly bad; so much so, that to avoid it is a better thing altogether, even when it is so good and important. And no one can make the Church alight from there. To put it in a few words, I’ll repeat what a friend of mine had to say after hearing a sermon in Mass: “God had a Son; and that Son descended to earth and began to preach that perfection consisted in *not* having children!”.

To all intent and purposes all this appears to be glaringly contradictory; the Church seems to hold two opposite heresies, both of which she has condemned. On the one hand, she seems to believe that the “flesh”, instinct, life, nature, are all perfectly good things, the likes of Pelagius’ doctrines (very much Chateaubriand’s bread and butter); but on the other hand, she also declares that the flesh is an evil thing, the devil’s creation, exactly what the Manichaean maintain. So where does that leave us? Could it be possible that she holds both doctrines, one for the masses, and the other one reserved for a group of elected? That was exactly what the Albigensians and Cathari held, the thirteenth century Manichaeans eventually exterminated by fire and sword.

The only way out of this quandary is to allow for the fact that *something has happened* between Paradise and us; or even better, that *two* things have happened: a mysterious “Fall” that has displaced human nature’s gravity center towards animality, which is, as we have seen, partly innate to him; and a “Redemption” equally mysterious, that didn’t restore man towards a state of natural equilibrium (that characterizes animal’s nature) but that instead through Redemption Christ has risen man to an even superior state. In sum, instead of befriending body and soul, it seems that God discomfited them even more; He made them enemies, and the outcome of this war is the only equilibrium or balance that will ever be given to man in this life; and something even more bizarre, *peace*: “Peace in war” as Unamuno had it.

For instance, consider a man who has made a vote of chastity: he has to say *no* thousands and millions of times to a very potent and natural urge; and on top of it all, this drive is an insidious one; and to be able to achieve this, he will have to fabricate for himself an artificial life, as it were. Having said that, a religious man (or woman) who brings this off with grace and style somehow makes it all seem almost natural.

If Christian doctrine had not triumphed in the world, or at least in the Western world, and that for nineteen centuries, securing positive and even extraordinary results, we should do away with this whole reasoning as one of the strangest monsters ever created by the delirious human intellect; which is, of course, exactly what many of our dear contemporaries think. However, there’s always Pascal: “The only religion which is against nature, against common sense and against our pleasures is the only one which has always existed”.

The facts are there, that “moral miracle” as the First Vatican Council put it, forces us to swallow the whole doctrine, hook, line and sinker, and admit that all this has been thought out by an intellect even more delirious than men’s: an intellect that knows more about man than any man; for whom these are obvious facts, while for us they are paradoxes, when not simply nonsense.

Against those who reject this evangelical counsel (never a mandate) of the chastity vote—and this because they deem it “absurd” to the extent that it implies dispensing with a good means destined to a very fine outcome—an idea that we naturally consider pure nonsense, we can only respond as follows: “Inevitably something like this has to have happened: *that means has become an end in itself*, has actually superseded its very purpose, actually it has replaced its objective; and in that way, has become (up to a point) *a bad thing*. But as it’s not entirely a bad thing, it can be corrected; and as it is not an entirely good thing anymore, it can be abandoned and repudiated, even to the point of renouncing to its natural and important purpose; now, all of this, of course, would only be legitimate if it were done to attain another purpose, done with a *supernatural* or transcendental objective in mind.

Otherwise, better to use… and correct it. Those lacking spiritual creativity would do better in getting married and not taking holy orders. They must not be admitted to them. The present Church’s sterility (at least in this country) is to a good extent due to the fact that (even among the rank orders) we find too many eunuchs of the first and second class, as Christ foresaw would be the case (Mattew, 19:12).

This good means become a bad thing (festered, arrogant, a perfect usurper) it’s what we know as *lust* (or “libido” as they like to say nowadays) of which Saint Augustin never tires to denounce as an evil thing, even when he admits that it is not necessarily a sin in itself, but an evil thing all the same; and the funny thing is that Freud, that prominent heretic, never tires of saying exactly the same thing. (I am here not referring to lust as a simple appetite which was once the case with Adam, but such as it is in man).

Suffice it to say that what we watch in films, T.V. shows, magazines, novels and theatre in general, and sometimes in real life too, to the point of even finding those same things included in some philosophies—then we realize that lust has usurped the position, the very place of man’s final end. Tantamount to saying that it simply promises *happiness*… which it can never yield. What we are seeing these days, could be seen in Saint Augustin’s times; and, more or less, always. It is an invincible usurpation. If all this is the product of a single sin, Adam’s sin, it means that sin in itself is something nearly unthinkable. It’s as serious as that.

Christ’s counterattack against the Usurper (that He called “the Strong One”) was as follows: “You want to be the all in all. Very well: I leave you all of it. Over here, things will remain that way”, as it applies to this particular example. But in all things it is the same: *leave it all*. And, He added, this is possible for man if he is assisted by God. For man by himself it’s impossible. The whole tremendous system of dogmatics with all its paradoxes, it’s contempt of riches, the promise of receiving the hundredfold, Papal Infallibility, Lents, canons, chancellors, cardinals, confessions and communions, callings to martyrdom, religious orders, eternal heaven and eternal hell; all those Passions, Deaths and Resurrections, come as a backup to the counterattack against Sin; that is, simply said, what “God with us” means, you only have to believe in this… (except the part about canons… you’re free to exclude them if you feel like it).

I’ll say nothing about other deeper things involving voluntary religious virginity: considering it as a heroic counterattack against the Original Sin and its effects, is enough for our purpose here.

Why didn’t God save man by other means? I haven’t a clue; but He must know. Anyway, the fact remains that *he didn’t* save man by other means. Sin unbalanced Man; and God saved man not by obliterating Sin and its effects (which would possibly involve annihilating man, this is to say, wiping out his free will) but by unbalancing him, as it were, still more: putting into him something superhuman, to the point that one could say *Oh félix culpa*, which in fact amounts to make sin play a part in salvation’s economy, just like Napoleon used to take advantage of the enemy forces’ movements in his march towards victory. *Etiam peccata? Ita: audio dícere, etiam peccata*: Says Saint Paul: “All things work together for good to them that love God”. Even sins? Yes, I dare say, including sins, says Saint Augustin.

Those who would save people otherwise (mentally suppressing Sin) are your current “naturalists”—but they cannot quite pull it off; “for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” and that name is Jesus, “whom ye crucified” adds Saint Peter.

It’s odd, but in all the Gospel Jesus never jokes about the devil, like we sometimes do (the Irish say that Saint Duncan caught the devil by his nose with a pair of tongs). I suppose this is so because he is the Prince of this World and the Word made flesh subposed himself in this World precisely to overcome that Prince coming from, as it were, *inside* the world: no able Captain jokes about his enemy. The XXth century has turned the devil into a joke; but that, of course, is a devil’s joke.

“That Christians should suffer is O.K.; but why do animals suffer?”—this simple reflection isn’t a silly one. It has been widely thought over by English Divines (it’s so English, isn’t it?, the way they love horses, cats and dogs) and ultimately it is a question connected with the tremendous problem of Evil in this World. If physical pain is a consequence and a fruit, and its only value lies in the fact that it preserves us from sin and purifies us, then why should animals suffer?

From here the Stoic picture emerges: that God could perhaps delight in the suffering of his creatures; an obsessive idea that appears now and then in darker religions; and that opens up a breach in the very notion of a Good supremely infinite; and we then hear Baudelaire’s terrible verses (in “Saint Peter’s denial”):

*What, then, has God to say of cursing heresies,  
Which rise up like a flood at precious angels' feet?  
A self-indulgent tyrant, stuffed with wine and meat,  
He sleeps to soothing sounds of monstrous blasphemies.  
  
The sobs of martyred saints and groans of tortured men  
No doubt provide the Lord with rapturous symphonies.  
And yet the heavenly hosts are scarcely even pleased  
In spite of all the blood men dedicate to them.  
  
- Jesus, do you recall the grove of olive trees  
Where on your knees, in your simplicity, you prayed  
To Him who sat and heard the noise the nailing made  
In your live flesh, as villains did their awful deeds.*

Baudelaire knew the answer to this, if only because he qualified this idea as a “blasphemy”. But then, why do animals have to suffer too? They simply don’t; or at least not in the sense that we understand the verb “to suffer”. If you read any good treatise on animal psychology you’ll see that the brute has feelings but hasn’t “conscience”. They cannot say “I’m suffering; and that *has been going on for a long time now*; and tomorrow I’ll also be suffering; *and God knows for how long yet*.” They feel the pain instantly; but if in a moment the pain disappears it is annihilated forever, for its traces in memory is not pain at all. That doesn’t happen to us, it is a state that we have never experienced; but what we do know is that we cannot properly say “This animal is suffering”, but more precisely, “There is pain in this animal”. I’ll note here that some saintly Fathers suppose that something like that is endured by those in Hell; but I’m not going into that, I prefer not to play the bull in a china shop.

Anyway, when all is said and done, why is there pain in animals if they do not sin? It is because of the Prince of this Planet. The whole earthly creation followed Lucifer’s fate, their natural Master; and Adam’s, their foster and renegade Master’s fate too. If God created Satan to rule this planet (which is the only explanation for these dark words of Jesus), therefore he must have created the world with Satan’s cooperation (for a while) *through* him, as it were; who was already substantially connected to it; even if creation took place after his rebellion and sin (they could have been contemporary for all I know), for it is well known that sin never destroys nature, it only changes its (natural) course. I’m not contending here that the act of creation was communicated to an angel (the divines all agree that that is impossible) but that the creative act went through him, like it constantly happens in human procreation (Borges is shocked by this, because of the lust involved. Well, he’ll just have to lump it, without that he wouldn’t be around; and his existence is a good thing).

So God acted according to the existing situation and through second causes, as he usually does; and this explains that his Creation included “thistles and thorns”; and through the influence of the First Sinner and the “Murderer from the Beginning”, we now have carnivorous beasts, microbes, mosquitoes and snakes—one of his reflections, an image and likeness of the very Devil. Adam received the Lord’s command of “dressing and keeping the garden of Eden” (Genesis 2:15), that is to say, that he and his offspring would have to win our secular Earth back, redeeming it in a reconquest which would free it from all its “thistles and thorns” and bit by bit transform it into Eden once more: slowly extending that little privileged corner of God’s Creation. Adam and his offspring were created to win back the world from the Strong One’s rule—to nullify Satan’s work. Adam failed and switched to the enemy camp; and that’s why the second Adam, Christ Himself, entered the fray.

Do not think that this is Manichaean theology, it’s Catholic theology… albeit in a speculative and hypothetical vein.

This is a suitable moment to remember the conversation between Saint Augustin and a Manichaean. He asked: “When the resurrection of the flesh, will the mosquitoes return to life?” The saint said: “It’s perfectly possible”. “You cannot believe a thing like that”, said the Manichaean. But the African sentenced: “I don’t see why not since even the damned will resurrect”.

That very same Manichaean asked another day, a day that caught the “Guru” rather tired: “What was God doing before creating the world?”. “He was preparing Hell for those who ask dumb questions”, was the answer.

*Se non è vero è bene trovato.*

In its suffering, mankind’s solidarity is manifest. People acknowledge that “the honorable end up paying for the sinners”. Christ never set himself to answer the great theological questions like “Why do children suffer?”, “Why do animals suffer?” or “Why do saintly people suffer?”—he found it sufficient to suffer himself; even when that gave the Eternal Father an “unfair” aspect, as an unjust Being: because that also is obvious, is it not?, that perhaps God’s inscrutable Justice looks rather like men’s injustices. But as my understanding is feeble and small in God’s Presence, I can easily believe that too.

But I’m not telling the truth. Christ once definitely answered all these questions.

“And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be manifest in him”.

At the very beginning of Dostoiewsky’s Great Inquisitor monologue you find the perfect reply to all these queries. With all his authority, Christ declared that Power and Love can adequately compensate any pain on earth, no matter how atrocious or inexplicable it may seem. John Karamázov contended, if you remember, that the horror of the little girl teared to pieces by the boyard hounds could never be compensated, not even by the Seven Hierarchies in Heaven: it simply means that, small wonder, John Karamázov sees less than God.

*One day we shall see why Infinite Equity had to temporarily dress up with the guises of Iniquity.*

*\**

What follows is a sample from one of Castellani’s best books (*El Evangelio de Jesucristo*, Buenos Aires, 1997, Vórtice, pp. 383-386), and we have thought these pages represent pretty well the way Castellani tackles the Gospels, how he handles difficult ideas, always in his nervous style that somehow doesn’t affect his elegant prose.

On being shot: providence or doom?

We have already seen—the Gospels show this easily enough—that Christ gives second place to his miracles. From his point of view they are merely illustrations and confirmations of his doctrine, managed with circumspection and great precaution owing to the fact that miracles tend to mean everything to the crowds. God performs miracles reluctantly.

Hence Christ accepts Destiny: and when he breaks its laws by introducing exceptions, he does it with full argument and reason. The pagans believed that Jupiter came under the sway of Destiny; Christ shows that God is above Destiny, but that, nevertheless, Destiny does exist.

“If Christ really disposed of the power to cure the sick and to resuscitate the dead—if he were God—and yet, didn't cure all the sick in the world, then perforce he must be a criminal.”

These words by an impious Englishman remind me of those others by a fellow countryman of mine: “Oh Virgin of Itatí, if you have healed my pig, and healed my donkey, why don't you heal me also, seeing that I'm from Corrientes too?”

The first act of common sense is to accept reality. Christ accepts human reality just as it is and above that promises Salvation, the Kingdom of Heaven. Miracles are like glimpses or flashes of insight into this Kingdom; but they do not profess to be the abolition of Destiny, or as it were, the immediate recovery of the Garden of Eden with a wave of the wand.

Destiny exists; it is made up with the laws of nature, heritage, the place where I was born, the education I received, the country where I acted, the time at which I lived, the sins I have committed, and, in fact, everything I have done... things that if and when I did them, were willingly done, but once done, became necessary. If I have an illness, contracted or inherited, it is part of my Destiny and with this and through this I must obtain my salvation. If a thaumaturgist comes along and cures me, lucky me. If not, I must learn to get on with it. A time will come for it to be cured—if I am saved.

If Christ accepted the Destiny of Humanity, with all its ills and misfortunes, it is obviously because he could not have done otherwise, even if he was God—or rather precisely *because* he was God. Here we are faced with an indestructible fact, a reality that has its own laws: Jews and Christians call it Original Sin. Oriental religions such as Buddhism recognize it without trying to explain it... Plato did the same, probably under oriental influence, plastering one of his myths over it. The mythology of all people contains myths that are remnants of this mystery.

It is a divine reality related to God; that is why it is a mystery and surpasses the boundaries of human reason; but the reality is there.

Christ accepts the Destiny of Humanity and accepts his own Destiny as a man. This is the capital fact. If Christ had carried out his miracles for his own benefit—excepting himself from the common Destiny—Butler's and Thomas Payne's objection would be valid. If “the doctor cured himself” he would be very much obliged to cure everyone else also as long as he were to bear the name of Saviour. But Christ did not perform a miracle for his benefit except the Resurrection which was, of course, for the benefit of everyone else. As a sick man, Kierkegaard said with bitterness: “the worst illnesses are where body and soul meet, such as melancholy, and Christ had this illness.” We might add that in his Passion he underwent all the illnesses together: a *leper*, the *man of sorrows*, and *acquainted with grief* as he was described by the Prophet.

Of course, the godless have an easy game for they supress the reality of Sin. If sin is an unreal concept, imaginary, a relationship of man with social laws invented by other men, then it is obvious that they are right. The existence of physical ills becomes a scandal and it becomes impossible to reconcile them with the existence of an all-powerful and paternal God. But physical ills are the result, the mirror, and the image of all moral ills. And the extreme resistance of man to this is a reflection of his soul's divine origin.

Bernard Shaw included my *Correntino's* objection in his *Major Barbara*. In art terms it is one of his weaker comedies, but one of his best as a pamphlet which was of course Shaw's main concern. It is a socialist tract on religion; the characters, rather than real people, sound more like dialectical puppets. Scandalised by the world's illnesses, which he summarises as poverty, he calls on the religions to reform themselves and do away with it and he expresses his disappointment with the Salvation Army that appeared at the beginning to be on the right path. Barbara, the leading character, is a brave girl, a major in the Salvation Army; she gets weary of her army “that has not saved anything” and finally becomes a capitalist.

“Cursed are the poor...”. Poverty is the supreme evil. One must have money... and money to count on. But the Churches, all of them, rely on the ill-earned money of the *rich*. There is a true christianity based on pardon and the renunciation of vengeance... and justice. There is a false Christianity—perhaps we could call it “Crosstianity”—based on the adoration of the gallows. The solution is to have money (Shaw had it) well earned (Shaw earned it by poisoning the English public with his sophist ingeniousness as a pseudo-prophet) and more or less morally distributed: “I save a soul with a salary of 38 shillings a week” says the cannon manufacturer. And in the last resort, even if the money is not well-earned, it is still money; and as poverty is the greatest evil, well, of course, logically.... Such is the theory of the English buffoon.

Your socialist is a capitalist who has no capital—yet. Born religious (Irish) Shaw in this work of his youth is moving from religious agnosticism to the vague modernism of his maturity.

What is interesting in his comedy-tract is the fact that it naïvely reflects the attitude of the ungodly towards creation: the impious man seizes the world and makes it his own; then he wants to fix it; for that purpose, he appeals to religion, and if all is to be said, to a new religion. But the world belongs to God, it is not mine, I am not the Creator.

Shaw candidly believes himself to be the Creator of the world. He doesn't start by submitting to reality, but instead believes himself to be the lord of reality.

The first reality is man's limitation; but man's reason is in a certain sense unlimited and so he can deify himself. The first reality with which man is faced is Destiny; but man is destined in the last resort to become the master of Destiny; and, in a spirit of pride, the false step that he may take induced by his reason, will make him feel the master of Destiny before his time: *now*. On the basis of the idea that man can see how things should be—according to his taste and convenience—he begins to lecture the fates. But the fates laugh at his teaching... If I suddenly want to become a capitalist, like Major Barbara in the comedy, I can't; Destiny laughs at me. This is easy enough in comedies and novels; but in Argentina it is only possible for sophists or dishonest writers. I know from experience that for me it is out of the question.

To submit to reality is to submit to God. The non-believer tries to free himself from reality and so he makes himself God. Once he is God, fixing the world on paper is quite easy: you can save souls on a 38-shilling weekly salary. The saviors-of-souls-with-salary-increases are well known to us.

The blasphemy of those who demand of God the immediate establishment of the total miracle of putting the world in order (in other words the maximum disorder) crystallised in Stendhal's well known phrase (and Nietzsche’s delight): “Fortunately God doesn't exist—otherwise we would have to shoot him.”

They have already shot him. That is is the irony of it. God became man and was shot by all that is high in the name of law; the Roman Law, nothing less, with all that it stands for, by the representative of public order in the most legally minded and juridicial Empire that has ever existed. What more can be asked for? Christ lived and was shot. *Tutti contenti*.

Stendahl's blasphemy is an imbecility and God's consent to being shot—or crucified which is worse—is Christ's greatest miracle. They complain that we adore his scaffold: that Gallows in itself is the Universal Miracle that they are asking for.

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Here’s my translation of a short book by Castellani (published in Spanish under the title *Will Christ Ever Come Back* (*Cristo, ¿vuelve o no vuelve?*, Buenos Aires, 1951, Paucis Pango, 274 pp.). As anyone can easily understand, Castellani lived in a Roman Catholic milieu where this topic was largely ignored—and he’s out to remedy this state of affairs. Perhaps for people surrounded by Protestants this doesn’t feel so urgent, but an orthodox view on the end of times is always a good thing and, as Scripture reminds us, usually begets sobering thoughts.

**WILL CHRIST EVER COME BACK**

**1.- Is Christ coming back⎯or not?**

Jesus Christ is coming back, and his doing so is one of the dogmas of our faith.

It is one of the more important dogmas, wedged between the fourteen articles of faith that we recite every day in the Credo and that we intone when we assist to a solemn Mass. *Et iterum venturus est cum gloria judicare vivos et mortuos.*

Also, it is a somewhat forgotten one. A splendid dogma, which few people reflect upon.

Its translation runs something like this: this world will not evolve indefinitely, nor will it end by chance, as if it were to collide with a fallen star, nor will it end by natural evolution of its elementary forces⎯or due to a *cosmic entropy* as physics like to say. Instead, it will end by a direct intervention from its Creator.

It will not die from a natural death, but by a violent one; or to put it better⎯since He is a God of life and not of death⎯from a miraculous death.

The Universe does not stem from a natural process as evolutionists or naturalists think, because it is a gigantic poem, a dramatic poem that God has reserved for Himself with its beginnings, climax and *dénouement*; that theologically are called Creation, Redemption and Second Coming.

Its main characters are all free willing humans. The natural forces at play are its wheel cogs. But the first actor and director of orchestra is God himself.

*“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”*. So said the two Angels when the Ascension took place.

And so will it be when the story of humanity ends.

**2.- Christ will never come back**

Modern world’s specific mental disease is to think that Christ will never come back; or, at the very least, refusing to think that He´s coming.

Consequently, our modern world doesn’t understand what’s happening to it. They say Christianity has failed. Intent on saving humanity, they invent fanatical as well as atrocious systems. They are about to beget a new religion. They want to build another Babel tower that will reach unto heaven. They want to win back Paradise with their own forces.

Out there you’ll find the world full of prophets that say "I am": “Here I am. Here is the program to save the world. The Peace Letter, the Pact for Progress and the League for Happiness. The U.N., the Unesco and the Unicef! Look at me! I am.”

As Hilaire Belloc described it, apparently today’s heresy doesn’t explicitly deny any one Christian dogma but contenting itself with falsifying them all.

But on second thoughts it manifestly denies Christ’s Second Coming; and with that it denies his Regnancy, his Messiahship and his Divinity. In short, it denies the whole divine process of history. And on denying Christ’s Divinity it denies God Himself. This is radical atheism dressed up with religious clothes.

While keeping the whole external machinery and all the Christian phraseology, it falsifies Christianity transforming it into an adoration of man; that is to say, giving man a throne in God’s temple as if he were God. It exalts man to the point of making him believe that his powers are infinite. It promises man the Kingdom of God and paradise on earth, to be obtained by his own might.

The adoration of Science, hope in Progress and the wild Religion of Democracy are but different expressions of idolatry, the idolatry of man; this is to say the devilish bottom line of all heresies, now in its purest form.

Emerging from Protestant dead debris, galvanized by a spirit that is not Christ’s, a new religion is born under our eyes.

It has been successively called Philosophism, Naturalism, liberal Protestantism, liberal Catholicism, Modernism... All those currents now converge and conspire to amalgamate a new universal faith. Rousseau, Renan and Marx were their predecessors.

This religion has no name yet, and when it will, its name will not be its own. All Christians who do not believe in Christ’s Second Coming will yield to it. And the new religion will make them believe in *the Other one* who will come before. For “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive” (Jo. V:43).

The first Pope wrote about them: “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts. And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all come to repentance” (2 Petr. III:3-9).

**3.- My words shall not pass away**

Our world is anxious for prophecy.

Because of the disasters and threats of these catastrophic times, it is only natural to want to know what’s next. He who doesn’t know where he’s going cannot walk a single step. Everybody is wailing, where is the world going?

False prophecies are addressed to this hunger for prophecies. It is necessary to let the right prophecies be known, for it is for that purpose that they were given to us.

Protestants have a pamphlet called “The Voice of Prophecy” that they widely distribute in South America. Argentine magazines such as “*Maribel”, “Mundo Argentino” and “El Hogar”*, assiduously offer prophecies by Nostradamus, Madame Thébes, the Great Pyramid, Malachias...

Some Catholics without much theology recklessly sift through private prophecies from the dangerous field of pious books.

We must, then, go back to the great primordial prophecy, Christ’s eschatological prophecy, Saint Paul’s prophecies and Saint John’s Book of Revelations.

This world will end. The end will be preceded by a great apostasy and a great affliction. After that, Christ’s Second Coming will take place, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

These prophecies are found firstly in what is known as our Lord’s eschatological sermon. Anyone can find them in the synoptics. Here they are, chapter and verse: Luke, XVII:20, Matthew, XXIV, 23 and Marc XIII:21.

Current ungodliness takes the main argument against Christ’s Divinity from this very sermon, as well as from its echoes which reverberate in Paul and Peter’s eschatological passages.

In effect, their contention is that Christ was mistaken and that He deluded his Apostles into believing that the world was ending then and there, when he was preaching, or little afterwards. They use the same words that Saint Peter put in their lips: “We have found His Second Coming promise at fault”. So Christ, they say, is not whom He said.

For this, they principally rest on one word of His: “Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done” (Mark, XIII:30). It seems that time has proved this most solemn oath mistaken. So Jesus was wrong.

Except that this precise reference to *time* is the key to all prophetic interpretations.

All prophecies unroll on two different levels and refer simultaneously to two events: a sooner one, known as *type*, and another, remote one, known as *antitype*. How could a prophet describe far off events, for which he would even find himself at fault with words? The only possible way would be to project present cognate circumstances into the future.

The prophet enters into eternity through a door in time; and by *transcendent transparency* he sees in present minor circumstances other indescribable events that will take place in the future. Seen analogically, that is the way great poets have of seeing things.

As Isaiah tells us about humanity’s redemption through his depiction of freedom from Babylonic captivity, and Saint John about Christ’s Second Coming while he reports ethnic Rome’s destruction, so did Christ, telling us about the end of the world through his account of the fall of Jerusalem and the Jewish People’s millenarian dispersion. That’s exactly what the Apostles asked Him about, thinking that both things were to happen simultaneously. Telling them, as He walked out of the Temple, that there would not be left one stone upon another, they thought about the end of times and interrogated him: “When will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things come to pass?”. Christ however, without trying to undeceive them and make them realize the truth⎯⎯for their error was inevitable then⎯⎯answered both questions at the same time and described in a single pantographed painting the Synagogue’s ruin, which was the end of an age, and the end of all ages, or, like they used to say, “the consummation of the aeon”.

So, “this generation” means both the Apostles present there and then⎯a reference to the *type*,namely the end of Jerusalem; but also the apostolic descendants and their spiritual generation⎯a reference to the *antitype*,namely the end of the world. The Apostles saw the end of Jerusalem, the Church shall see the end of the world.

So, after all, the rationalistic objection has resulted in an occasion to stimulate and illuminate the catholic interpretation of Scriptures, now in possession of the key to exegesis. And Heitmüller and Renan’s savage efforts to apply every verse from the Book of Revelations to the events that took place in Nero’s time⎯64 AD⎯have been converted into very useful tools for any true Christian: by their works they illuminated the *type* so that we can better understand the *antitype*.

4.- **The Great Tribulation**.

“Antichrist has ceased to alarm us... We know that the end of the world is not so near as the inspired seers of the First Century believed and that it will not end by a sudden catastrophe. It will happen through the coldness of hundreds of Centuries, when our system will not be able to replace its waste any more and the planet Earth will have exhausted its resources drawn from the old Sun’s breasts.

But before this bankruptcy, will humanity reach perfection in Science⎯that is nothing less than dominating all cosmic forces⎯or will the Earth turn out to be another failed experiment in millions, transformed into ice before we solve the problem of giving death to death? We cannot say. But with the seer of Patmos, over the tide of vicissitudes, we can perceive the ideal, and we are positive that one day it will be accomplished.

Amidst the fogs of an undeveloped Universe we contemplate the laws of progress of all life, the gradual growing of conscience in all beings pushing ever forward the frontiers of its ends and the possibility of a final stage in which everything will be submerged into a definite Being, God, in the same manner that we find innumerable sprouts and buds in every tree, in the same manner that we find millions of live cells in the living organism of the living. In such a state universal life will be accomplished; and every single individual that has been will live again in the life of God, will see in Him, will rejoice in Him and sing in Him the eternal Alleluia.

No matter how you conceive the future advent of the Absolute, the Book of Revelations cannot but rejoice us. Symbolically it expresses the fundamental principle that God is not so much ‘the one who is’, but ‘the one who will be’”.

So says Renan, the Breton apostate, the father of modernism.

Facing this Averroist and atheistic dream of gradual dissolution into God, and this preposterous and perfectly irresponsible Bergsonian evolutionary fable, Christ’s categorical word says that the world will end suddenly, that men will be judged, that not all will enter into Life (“like live cells in the living”), for many will perish from their “second death”, the definitive one; and that a terrible battle will precede all this in one supreme agony, the ultimate resolution of History’s drama.

In their simple brevity, Christ’s words are far more fearsome than the fulgurant visions of the Book of Revelations, with its terrific scenes of blood, fire and ruins. Christ simply says that there shall be a great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever shall be—and we have seen more than one!—and that except those days should be shortened, no flesh would be saved, and that if it were possible, even the elected would perish. The terrible wars, plagues and earthquakes that must come to pass are but the beginning of sorrows. The Sorrow itself will be even worse. Because, having ripened, the world’s iniquity will rise in all its artlessness and will draw from all its previous rehearsals, this time directed by Satan in person, who will be cast unto the earth having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. Woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! Woe unto them that remain to be riddled and winnowed out by Satan himself in the last trial!

The two antagonic forces that battle in the world since the Fall will reach their maximum tension in their effort to prevail. The saints will be overcome and defeated everywhere. Apostasy will cover the world like the Flood. Iniquity and lies will have a free hand. The most powerful political governance ever seen will not only slaughter Religion with fire and sword, but will dress up as a false religion too. And the few remaining faithful will seem to lose their poise when, separated from the Obstacle, the *Son of Perdition* makes his appearance; him in which God has no part and that Christ not even deigned to name: Antichrist.... the Other one.

To talk about a “tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world” is to say a lot. It means that the Christians of those times will suffer as no one ever suffered before; not even like Job, nor Oedipus, nor Hamlet; not like Thomas More, Edmund Campion or Saint John of the Cross. And those Christians have already passed away; it is us, or people near to us. Let us welcome such afflictions as long as we see Christ’s Coming once again!

“Gentlemen, consider one thing only. In old times tyranny was a ferocious and devastating thing; and yet, that tyranny was physically limited, because the States were small and universal relations were all but impossible. Gentlemen, the paths are ready for a gigantic, colossal, universal, immense tyranny... There is no place anymore for physical or moral resistance. Physical, because with ships and trains there are no more frontiers, with the telegraph there is no more distance... And moral resistance is impossible because all souls are divided and every patriotism dead.” [[4]](#footnote-4)

5.- **Sweet promises**.

The awesome visions of the Seer of Patmos—that Renan calls “deliriums of terror”, and Christ’s words—stronger words in their steely transparency than those used by his disciple—should induce to panic and despair were they not compensated by the most sweet promises.

As the *greatest* tribulation in its short span of years conveys an inordinate terror, in the same way, the conditional “were it possible” expresses the most loving promise. “Were it possible, the very elect would be deceived”, says Christ.

It is not possible, then, for the elect to fall. An Angel seals their foreheads and numbers them. God commands that the great plagues be suspended until everyone is sealed. Out of love for them, God shortens the persecution. Antichrist shall only reign for half a week of years (42 months, 1.260 days). The martyrs shall all be avenged. The ungodly shall suffer countless plagues. Two great saints will defend Christ having in hand prodigious powers. And when they fall, Christ will summon them and they will revive.

Then we who are still alive shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. That will be the First Resurrection. And we will reign with Christ a thousand years, that is to say, for a long time, in a restored Jerusalem where one day all the messianic promises must be fulfilled: because not one of the sweet promises from Scriptures will be excluded from its complete fulfilment to a point exceeding any hope or dream of man, whatever be the real sense of this difficult word, that we here do not pretend to interpret... Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection!

But before that, the Mystery of Iniquity must reveal itself, the Two must reign, the Obstacle must be removed, the Great Whore must die.

6.- **The mystery of iniquity.**

The *Mystery of Iniquity* embodies the hate of God and the adoration of man. The *Two Beasts* represent political powers and religious instinct, both revolted against God and dominated by the Pseudo-Christ and the False Prophet. In our opinion “*The Obstacle”* is the Roman Order. The *Great Whore* is religion corrupted and surrendered to world powers, and it also indicates ethnic Rome, where the *Mystery of Iniquity* appeared in the first place, and moved St. John to so much awe when he saw it.

The adoration of man and the hate of God have existed always. “The mystery of iniquity doth already work”—says St. Paul to the Thessalonians—“only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And now ye know what wihholdeth him”.

The Mystery of Iniquity is the foundation of the City of Man that battles against the City of God from the beginning; it is the root of all heresies and the fire of all persecutions; it is “the creature’s incestuous imperturbability, settled on its specific difference”; it is the continuous rebellion of sin’s intellect against its beginning and end, a multiplied echo through the ages since Satan’s said “I will not serve” for the first time.

The Mystery of Iniquity’s peak is the hate of God and the idolatric adoration of Man.

The Mystery of Iniquity tends to embody itself in a political mechanism that triturates the saints. It sentenced Socrates, persecuted the prophets, crucified Jesus and then multiplied the martyrs; it is this that will destroy the Church once the *Obstacle* is retired—when it will take the form of a man of diabolical magnificence, the cleverest and most fallacious of plebeians, possibly of Jewish ascendancy, with a superhuman intellect and absolute wickedness, to whom Satan will lend his power and accumulated wrath.

Assisted by the Holy Ghost, the Church obstructs its manifestation and reduces it, grounded on the human order that the Roman Empire organized in one political and legal body; but a day will come when we’ll arrive to the end of that age, and when that happens, the Obstacle shall be removed. *Perhaps* the Holy Ghost will then abandon that historical social body, called Christendom, carrying with it the elected to the most absolute solitude, giving it two wings of a great eagle enabling them to fly into the wilderness. And then the Church’s temporal structure will be Antichrist’s prey thus establishing the conditions that will enable him to fornicate with the kings of the earth⎯at least with most of them, as has happened before⎯and the abomination of desolation shall stand in the holy place.

Will it be the reign of an Antipope, or a false Pope? Does it mean that Rome shall be materially destroyed? Will a sacrilegious cult be enthroned? We know not. We know that the Book of Revelations, when it describes the Great Whore, indicates with all precision “the city of seven hills”, an interpretation that St John received from the very Angel that showed him these things.

7.- **The Great Whore**

Her name is Mystery, Great Babylon, Mother of all the world’s fornications and abominations. She sits upon a scarlet beast full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. She is arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and is decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of filthiness and is drunk with the blood of Christ’s martyrs.

The temptation of yielding to the powers of this world, of looking for man’s salvation over here, of adoring the tyrannical State, is the supreme temptation. In our own days it has been rationally systematized by a great German philosopher, Hegel. The Synagogue submitted to this temptation when it demanded a temporal kingdom; Christ Himself was tempted with this; and consequentially so is the Church unceasingly tempted in the same way.

Perhaps Christ’s three temptations were but this temptation evolving in three different levels. “If thou be the Son of God, command these stones be made bread”, this is to say, use your religious powers, the power of doing miracles, as a means of providing to your own needs and to acquire earthly goods. Isn’t bread necessary? Did not God make it? Are you not capable of using bread rightly, without glutton? Are you not hungry?

Belloc the historian, calculated that when Protestantism broke out in Europe, the Church in England owned a fifth of the land and a third of the country’s income. In most cases, this wealth was not undue or badly managed; but they were earthly possessions, possessed with too deep an attachment. The Church of England sank with the weight of this wealth, the very instrument or occasion of its ruin. The goods of the Church are not the Good of the Church. Unfortunately, sometimes these possession act like a tail dragging on earth, the tail that induced that saintly man, Don Orione, to jokingly observe: “Some of these ecclesiastics are like dumb dogs: you have to cut their tales if you wish to loosen their tongues”. Unfortunately, this encouraged so many heretics during Reformation, Crammer and Mortimer; so many apostates in times of the French Revolution, Sieyés and Talleyrand. We freely admit this. And if not, would things stand differently if we silenced or denied it?

The second temptation is: “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, so men, seeing you fly, will adore you”. In other words, use your religious powers to search and find distinction and power; to be renowned, acclaimed, honoured, and obeyed; to shine as the light of men and all people. If religion is not venerated, if it is not obeyed, what’s the use of it? Why, do you perhaps covet your own glory in that? No, you pursue the glory of God, the glory of the Church, the high repute of your Order, of your convent; you aim at the honour of all priests, of the Curia, of the Pontificate. “Show thyself to the world!” just as his relatives and friends said to Him later. Make yourself the admiration of the masses! Make fire come down from the sky! Make a sign in the clouds! Come, that we want to make you our King!

The excess of pomp, even religious pomp; too many ceremonies, too much exteriority, *propaganda*, as they would say today; the excessive deference towards science and its gadgets, the attachment to *heavy temporal instruments*, the secularisation and worldliness of religious activities, the excessive and inert Church burocracy, the pragmatic and not charismatic priests, the general agitation and sacramentalism replacing contemplation; all things said, what Péguy used to call “the descent of mysticism into politics” are in the Church *fermentum phariseorum* that stuffs the lump, and the second temptation is made up of this.

The first temptation was human; the second one pharisaic; the third one is satanic.

“All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me”. That is to say: acquire for religion a kingdom of this world; and search for it with the best means at your disposal, that are the devil’s. Now, in our opinion, the Militant Church is not Christ’s Kingdom in this world, only the instrument to assemble the congregation of Christ’s spouse, a congregation intended to be caught up and meet the Lord in the air.[[5]](#footnote-5) But, just as the Jews coveted a temporal King, the Church is also tempted with the desire to reign in this world, in an avuncular way, to reign over worldly kingdoms. “Come on, oh Church! Crush the Albigenses, burn all heretics, extirpate the Huguenots, expel the Jews!”.

If Belloc was right, when the Reformation exploded in Europe there was an excess of material pressure, of ruler’s excessive coercion: to say it all, of religious violence, as well as too much wealth and pomp. This would be the truth that the Reformation took away and held in captivity and that we must recover.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The Greek schism has always accused the Roman Church of having succumbed to this supreme temptation of obtaining Christ’s Kingdom in this world through worldly, deceptive and even perverse means. In his terrible apologue, the Great Inquisitor from Dostoiewsky’s *Brothers Karamazof* formulated not in a categorical manner, but hesitatingly, this complaint from the East referred to their Western counterparts. But only at the end of this, in our times, would the accusation fully hit its mark.

If we keep in mind that until the end of this *aeon* the tares will be inevitably mixed up with the wheat, then we can understand that the fringes of the Promised Princess’s skirts shall always be defiled; and that her heel shall be bruised by the serpent. Luther’s mistake was to ignore this and to try and purify the Church impatiently rooting up the tares now, forgetting that Jesus Himself had warned that they were reserved till the Time of Harvest. And for the reapers, not for men.

By untimely trying to uproot the tares, Luther scattered them.

8.- **The Two Beasts**.

When the Church’s temporal structure will eventually lose the Spirit’s effusion and the adulterated religion will become *The Great Whore*, then the Man of Sin and the False Prophet will make their appearance, a King of Universe who shall be at the same time the Most High Priest of the World; or perhaps he shall have at his bidding a false Priest, which in the prophecies is called the False-prophet.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Only recently President Truman and the King of England decreed a Day of Thanksgiving to God, because He conceded victory in this war⎯⎯but this understood as if it was God’s duty to do so, since much before they had *ex cathedra* and infallibly defined that they were fighting for God.

If this isn’t assuming functions from Pontiffs and Kings, then I don’t know what is. So will things be at the End of Times, even when in a much more universal and compulsive manner, when the Beast of the Sea and the Beast of the Earth will make their appearance.

Antichrist shall be both a corporation and an individual that will incarnate and govern it.

1. A corporation, because so does St John defines him*: “spiritus qui solvit Jesum”* (I John, IV:3), “spirit of apostasy”, meaning a *spirit,* which is to say a certain manner of being that informs lots of people.
2. An individual, because St Paul calls him “The man of sin, the son of perdition who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (II Thessalonians, III:3-4).

It is impossible to apply this last text to a corporate body such as Freemasonry or eighteenth-century philosophism. Lacunza (in his book “The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty”) skilfully tried to do so, but the results are unconvincing. Like many a talented researcher he draws freely from his intuition but rarely sees anything that could lead him away from such insights.

Lacunza contended vigorously in favour of the thesis that maintains that Antichrist shall not be a man in particular but a moral body with a unified doctrine and an apostate spirit; thesis that some Fathers conceded. But it was exaggerated by the Protestants and is now very common among modern exegetes (for example Hallo, in “L’Apocalypse”). Lacunza was rightly bothered by the sort of picture that came down to us from old days, of a kind of Jewish Emperor, from the tribe of Dan, who would reign in Babylon or Jerusalem, destroy Rome and govern the world, imaginative and picturesque stories like those found in Maluenda and Leonardo Lesio’s long works.[[8]](#footnote-8)

9.- **The legendary Antichrist.**

Antichrist is the biggest mystery in human history, as well as the key to its metaphysics. Not surprisingly it has powerfully stirred men’s curiosity, and foreseeably enough the short and obscure texts in the Bible about him would seem insufficient to nosey and fabulist exegetes (some of them quite famous, like Ambrosiaster). They started to pick up any sacred text in any way referred to the perverse and apostate (“A naughty person, a wicked man, he walketh with a froward mouth. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers” in the Book of Proverbs, VI:12-13) and gathered any apposite coincidence (like Dan’s tribe being omitted in the Book of Revelation—VII:5) using for their purpose any wicked King in the Scriptures. With this data, mingled with private revelations or simple imaginations, they composed quite pious novels, not unlike the New Testament Apocrypha.

Antichrist would be a Jew, from the tribe of Dan, born from a Jewish but converted nun, his mother, inseminated by a Bishop!⎯ if not by the Devil himself. He would not have a Guardian Angel. He would be born with teeth and blaspheming. He would swiftly acquire knowledge of all sciences. Satan would be his constant companion, etcetera, etcetera.

These obliging commentators have depicted his court, his conquests, armies, women, wicked and serpentine doings, his magic prodigies, one of them being to rise in the air mocking the Ascent of the Lord, who suddenly blows him back to earth where his definitive downfall takes place (*“interficiet spiritus oris sui”*).

Briefly put, they prepared the ways for Hugo Wast’s novel “Juana Tabor-666”, which at least only professes to be a novel, and is not a bad one at that; it reads better than Maluenda, whose book is made up of not much more than clumsy interpretations of Scripture under the guise of a boring novel.

Bossuet, followed by Calmet and others, in his explanation of Revelations which he makes only relevant to the history of the Church during the first centuries⎯a system that wasn’t his either but one drawn from Juan de Mariana and Luis de Alcázar (and later botched by Renan)⎯identifies Antichrist with the Roman Emperor Diocletian, the last persecutor, decoding the number 666 from the name Diocles Agustus.

But Bossuet, to whom we are in debt for convincingly explaining the method of *type* in interpreting Revelations, sagely observes that in his system he doesn’t exclude *quelqu’autre sens caché*: this is to say that there is place here for the *anti-type*; e.g. the anagogic sense, the primal and transcendental meaning in all prophecies. This is what Renan suppressed, watering down the last book in the Bible turning it into a mere poetic chronicle, and a delirious and fraudulent one at that. What I mean is this: that Renan treats St John as if he were a deranged and deceitful man, one who knew things that would come to pass soon but who deliberately deferred them to later times.

10.- **Antichrist in History**.

The later Middle Ages saw Antichrist in Mohammed; and didn’t hesitate to calculate the number 666 with the letters of his name, an easy enough charade. The terrible danger that the Muslim empire represented for Christianity in those days and the historical menace that at times seemed quite unanswerable explains this appropriation. Of course, it’s true that Mohammed impersonates one of Antichrist’s types and figures, the Son of Perdition, one of the Scarlet Beast’s head: as far as we can see, he’s the Second Beast in Daniel, the Bear.

This notion is quite common among quite a few writers culminating these days with Hilaire Belloc whom, in “The Crusades” and “The Great Heresies”, holds this opinion and opens up a new, more daring⎯but not rash⎯one in the latter book: that Islam may be reborn as an Antichristian Empire, a more powerful and awesome one than before, in a similar way to that head of the Scarlet Beast that was mortally wounded and yet resurged in the last days, much to the whole world’s amazement. This prophecy is found twice, in St John and Daniel.

This is by no means impossible: and there are more than a couple of reasons to believe it. On the 4th of March 1945, in Egypt the Arab League was silently established. In 1823 the insightful writer Joseph de Maistre enigmatically predicted the actual catastrophes founding them on this theological fact, that he subtly elucidates: Protestantism, he says, having taken a Socinian turn, now denying Christ’s divinity, is in fact a Mohammedanism of sorts, not only in its dogma⎯something quite manifest in his times⎯but also in its morals, as is clear after the Lambeth Conference in 1928. All this means that Western Civilization has assisted to the sudden withdrawal of its religious foundations; or to put it better, its essential adulteration.

So the West has been, so to speak, “Muslimmed” or “Muslimized”.

Without Christianity, our world is not essentially different from Mohammedanism, except for its Christian atavisms, and the desperate resistance from surviving Catholic ramparts (see the last chapter in Chesterton’s *The Flying Inn*).

And so, perhaps resurrected Mohammedanism would be more of a cultural phenomenon and not necessarily a political one; like the Beasts in Daniel, that more likely represent cultures and religions and not political empires (which in turn seem better represented by the Statue). Today we can plainly discern a cultural and political Mohammedanism, that de Maistre thought to be Protestantism’s decaying outcome.

Taking for example books that these days aptly portray common thinking among Americans on moral and religious issues (say, ”Babbit” or “Elmer Gantry” by Sinclair Lewis, Erle Stanley Gardner’s score of widely read detective novels or Kenneth Fearing’s clever masterwork “The Big Clock”) one can conclusively verify that this big and powerful nation has very lively people who are not amoral or immoral as many resentful Latin Americans suspect, but, instead, actually have morals and religion (and perhaps more severe and energetic than the weakened Catholic morals in South America); but that those morals and religion correspond, trait by trait, more to Mohammed’s and not to Christ’s, never mind who they actually invoke. One can easily draw the same conclusion from any other Protestant country’s literature⎯something I’ll refrain from doing here, out of fear of becoming tiresome. De Maistre’s prophecy has been accomplished in its Moral and Dogmatic concerns.

In other words: the belief in an inaccessible God, the suppression or falsification of true mysticism, the denial of Incarnation and, in a nutshell, of the *mysterious* as such; naturalism, anti-sacramentalism, appeals to emotion and action, *socialization* of religion… So much for dogmatics; but consider the morals: polygamy, slavery, sacred wars, the cult of riches, a barbarous energy in *struggleforlifers…*[[9]](#footnote-9)I leave off, for there are many who know America better than me.

The actual mentality of degenerate Protestantism is in fact a cultural and religious Mohammedanism. Nowadays their *weltanschauung* and *message* do not essentially differ from Islam.

11.- **Protestant’s Antichrist.**

With the arrival of Protestantism, mainstream interpretations on Antichrist suffered a substantial variation. Luther, for one, applied the terrible scatological tag to the Pope, and was that way the first to explicitly discuss two important questions⎯that one can find in some Fathers, like the Blessed Liebana: firstly, that Antichrist is not an individual, but an institution of sorts; and, secondly, that the Church founded by Jesus Christ can be corrupted and in fact so she will be, at the end of times.

This last thesis is obviously a delicate one for any Catholic⎯for instance, Lacunza is very cautious when dealing with the subject; and many theologians have thought that only nefarious people would bring it up. The way Luther proposes it is simply heretical and goes against Holy Scriptures. There, in the middle of the Bible, stands the great promise on the Gates of Hell. The expression *Ecclesia de medio fiet* from the first Revelation’s commentator, St Justin the Martyr, must be interpreted as referring to an almost, but not quite complete, extinction, not to an absolute corruption. “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”.

For a whole century Protestant interpreters were bitterly intent on applying the thirteenth vision from the Book of Revelation⎯The Great Whore⎯to the papacy. The city there referred to by the Angel is doubtlessly Rome. The necessarily evasive commentaries to this fragment can only choose between two alternatives: that the text refers to a Rome exclusively in the past, or else to a Rome exclusively in the future, imagined and transformed; this is to say, that it indicates ethnic Rome, that St Peter called Babylon or else refers to a renegade Rome, Antichrist’s headquarters that some novelists, following Lacunza, did indeed imagine.

Lacunza freed a truth that until then was captive to Protestants. It is well known that the pretext and “pathos” that grounded Luther’s superficial dogmatic framework and Calvin’s more rigid one, was Rome’s corruption and worldly papacy in Renaissance times. And this, to the point that Chesterton could well define Anglicanism as a negative mixture of anti-clericalism and anti-Romanism, this is to say, Northern racial proudness and anti-sacerdotal rage.

In 1933 I visited London’s Tate Gallery and in its first hall I bumped into at least four pictures by great contemporary painters that colourfully translate this statement: a scene by Gil Blas depicting dissolute friars in a Spanish tavern; a fantasy on the Invincible Armada’s defeat; a glorification of Elizabeth, the unclean virgin; and a brilliant “historic” picture by Sargent, with a “historic” text by Sannazaro underlying it, where Lucrecia Borgia the Popess is seen sitting on the papal throne, a stunning mermaid beauty, with two Franciscan and Dominic friars disgracefully kissing her clog.

The whole of the dissident’s apologetics and current dogmatic fits in this picture, a *capolavoro* of pre-Raphaelite painting: anticlericalism and Northern racial haughtiness.

Lacunza has freed from this arrogant Protestant horror the bitter truth found in the tares parable, that remains mixed up with the wheat and cannot be gathered up until the Angels do so at the end of times. Luther stumbled on these tares, and wanting to gather them up, he actually scattered them.

12.- **Lacunza’s Antichrist**.

Lacunza was a South American jesuit, very learned in Holy Scriptures, of a saintly and prayerful life; his lot was to suffer the terrible luck of belonging to a Society that was struck by the expulsion from America, first, and the total extinction of his order later, a joint decision passed by King Charles III and Pope Clement.

Undoubtedly the effect of this disaster raised in his soul of renewed Christianity the wonderful intuition (not really impugnable because of a few partial blunders) that underlies his admirable book *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, a classical exegetical work that honours South American letters, and that our Manuel Belgrano and his brother the ambassador arranged to be printed in London, inspired by “pure American patriotism” as they used to say in those days. [[10]](#footnote-10)

Lacunza thought that Antichrist was eighteenth-century Philosophism—a statement not far from the mark, as we shall see later. Terribly hurt—*et pour cause—*in his heart he was horrified by the premonitory symptoms of the French Revolution; Pope Benedict XIV corresponding with Voltaire; and dissolute Cardinal de Benis (*Babet la Bouquetière*), Choiseul’s disciple and a friend of the Pompadour prostitute, intriguing in Rome, he didn’t hesitate to apply to Rome the terrible vision of the Great Whore, drunk with sacrilegious wine and fornicating with the kings of the earth; not to the Ethnic Rome of the past, but renegading the Rome of the future, anticipating it by projecting the outlines of that city in his days.

What I have to say is this: Lacunza—without scandal nor excited passion, but with quite a bit of humility and patience—set free from Protestant theology one of the Gospel’s truths; one can, if one feels like it, reject his opinions as an exegete, but no one in his senses can deny his genius for apologetics. In effect, to the poor Protestant with no more excuses for his schism than “the terrible scandals in the past” he peacefully answers back: “That is nothing compared to what⎯perhaps⎯we’ll see someday. That is nothing else but the tares sowed by the enemy in the householder’s field—an argument that rather proves and not disprove the fact that the Church has been Divinely established…” A good case of *retortio argumenti*, St Augustine’s, the King of Apologists, elegant manner of arguing. “Do you mean this or that? Well then, I freely grant you this or that, and yet much more⎯except that in this or that you’ll find a hidden key to all that shocks and bewilders you.” That’s the method he uses in *De Civitate Dei* against the heathen.

Antichrist probably belongs to eighteenth-century Philosophism, a projection of the protestant pseudo-Reform, and a type of the new religion that’s taking shape today under our eyes, call it what you will (modernism, aloguism, anthropolatry), that shall doubtlessly be the last heresy, for one cannot go further in this matter.

And Antichrist shall also be a unique man, since every objective *spirit* cannot exist or act except incarnating itself, and that every historic movement causes a man to rise above the rest. All great sociological movements provoke the appearance of a head to guide it; like, for instance, Mussolini, who created and at the same time was a creature of Italian nationalism.

This is an obvious historical law that Carlyle exposed in his book “Hero and Heroworship”. This synthesis between the old patristic thesis of a personal Antichrist and Lacunza’s anti-thesis is probably—not to say surely—the right solution. That’s the way things happen in human history.

13.- **The artistic Antichrist**.

Such a synthesis has been illustrated by that great novelist and psychologist that was Robert Hugh Benson in his admirable parable, “The Lord of the World”,[[11]](#footnote-11) that I have translated in 1958 for Itinerarium, the Buenos Aires’ publisher.

It is one of English literature masterworks, undoubtedly his best book, a theological poem at “Paradise Lost” and “Pilgrim’s Progress” heights. In it, the author contemplates the transformation of modern humanism into a positive religion that in those days, 1910, is proposed by one socialist leader, Gustave Hervé, a disciple of Auguste Comte; projecting the lines of contemporary apostasy he incarnates it in a mysterious plebeian of devilish greatness, Julian Felsenburg, an orator, a linguist, a statesman who in the twinkling of an eye attains the world’s throne with the title of “President of Europe”.

As belongs to an artistic work, this imaginary picture of the *Man of Sin* leaves out all the prophetic aspects of the Second Coming except one; and this is all for the better as it gains in concentration and unity—something that we miss in other, similar novels of this kind.

So Antichrist will be a Universal Secular Empire associated to a New Heretic Religion; incarnated in a man, or perhaps two men, the *Tyrant* and the *False* *Prophet*.

For a short while these two *Beasts* shall wield the instruments of the most gigantic extortion and persecution that has ever existed: the Machiavellian mechanics of a brutal Cosmopolitan International State. Such an instrument will reproduce line-by-line Nero’s sacrilegious Empire, the one John had before his very eyes when writing Revelations.

The Prince of this World’s apparatus and his cruel short lived victory, shall be destroyed by the Lord Jesus with the brightness of his Coming and with a single word of His that will kill the sacrilegious King and annihilate the double Beast.

But before that, the Elect will be percolated by the Supreme Tribulation, the one that leads up to Judgement Day; that will probably not be a 24 hour day, but a long stretch of time, like the days of Creation.

14.- **Is the Second Coming a long way off?**

St John in the Book of Revelation says that Christ’s Second Coming (this is to say His appearance with all severity in human history) will be soon; from the very beginning, when he titles his book as “Revelation… to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass” to the end where he says “Surely I come quickly” and also “I stand at the door and knock. Be patient. I come now”.

Now? This disconcerting statement upon which today’s (and all time) infidels stumble, verifies itself in three ways: transcendentally, mystically and literarily.

1. *Transcendentally*. The historic period known as “the last days” (meaning the current dispensation that runs from the First to the Second Coming), shall be very brief when compared with the world’s total duration.

An old Hebrew-Christian tradition, and a very respectable one at that, holds that this “age” (the Adamic cycle, from Adam to Judgement Day) lasts seven thousand years matching Creation’s seven days, for “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years” (II Petr. 3:8): two thousand years governed by Natural Law, another two when the Mosaic Law was in force; then two millennia ruled by the Christian Law; and finally the last thousand years, Sunday, reserved for the universe’s joyful transformation under the Throne of the Word (“I shall make a new heaven and a new earth”), a great event to take place after the Second Coming.

So, in this transcendental sense, Christ could in all truth announce that his Second Coming was near.

2. *Mystically.* The Judgement of all men, not less than that of all nations, is always close at hand because of death, something that can take place at any moment; and death always unexpectedly occurs when man is in the middle of that eternal haze and distraction that seems to be his dominating trait. All through the Gospel Christ’s method of teaching seems to be shot through with a constant warning to men about their imminent and unexpected death. “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then who shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”.

From our own experience we know that even when hopelessly ailing, death surprises old men with its suddenness: in the sense of its unexpectedness; so what? Who really expects it? I happened to be present when a saintly religious man was dying. He was angry when a Superior referred to the last rites. “I am no man to die without the last sacraments,” he said, “but these young superiors are so rash and precipitated that as soon as they hear of someone suffering this or that, they rush with holy oils to their bedside”. He received them however, because he was a docile man; and that very afternoon he was dead.

Well then, things will be the same at the End of Times, “for as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage”; “for as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be”. So it is a sensible thing to think that the end is close at hand, because in fact it could be indeed today, when our lamps are without oil, like the foolish virgins; we must think the end to be nearby, not however as a certain thing, because that would paralyse all human activity as happened with the Thessalonians—but as something possible, foreseen and expected. And also piously hoped for. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

3.- *Literally.* The *types* that Our Lord and St John resorted to depict the end of times (this is to say, the end of a cycle), were immediately fulfilled with Jerusalem’s destruction, first, and then, later, with the fall of the Roman Empire: in its first phase this prophecy was fulfilled for those that had heard Jesus Christ’s preaching; and perhaps it is us, who think less than the first Christians about the end of times, who will actually see its full accomplishment. And without doubt we are nearer than them to seeing such things!

This is so because History’s drama unrolls on different levels, like any play that unfolds in different scenes, all of which include the same fundamental idea that finally shines in all its brilliance with its denouement. So, as we have seen the calamitous downfall of every great Empire that persecuted Christians, because we have assisted to great resurrections of Christianity and seen how God sweepingly destroys entire apostate and degenerate races, we can consider all these events as partial and figurative fulfilments of His Presence (*paraousia*) in History and of His definite Revelation (apocalypses). [[12]](#footnote-12)

15.- **The signs of the times**.

All prophetic books are necessarily obscure and are only completely clear once the prophecies are fulfilled. For instance, the Book of Revelation includes a prophecy of every persecution the Church would suffer, typically in the first (Nero’s) and the last one (by Antichrist), followed by God’s timely punishments and Christ’s victories.

Two thousand years after the First Coming, being as we are closer to the prophecies’ fulfilment and in that sense better placed because of our position in time, it is only natural that we should understand them improvingly. “Shut the words up—says the Angel to Daniel—even to the time of the end”. But an Angel says to St John: “Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand”.

So it is not rash to think that Holhauser or Lacunza have deduced certain things from Revelation that the first Fathers did not understand that clearly—all the more so because they interpret the Book in perfect harmony with all the Saintly Fathers; not *inventing*, but unfolding and getting to the bottom of matters, which is the proper method of developing Christian Doctrine.

Anyway, the first Christians clearly understood eschatology in their own terms and times—the proof being that the believing Jews flew from Jerusalem to Pella as soon as they felt Armageddon was upon them when they saw that Titus’ Second Army was laying siege to the city. After that, the book was shut for them. The interpretations and commentaries multiplied in such manner that to read them and try to compose them all is a real pain in the neck—as anyone can find out reading Alcázar o Cornelius Alapide for instance, as I have been doing these days.

Infidels have always thought these prophecies to be delirious nonsense. Lukewarm Christians avoid them. And yet, the Book of Revelation makes a special promise to those who keep them: “Blessed is he that keeps those things which are written therein”.

But when a prophecy is fulfilled, then those who have kept it in their hearts—and only them—will easily see that this is their realization and cannot be anything else. So happened to Gamaliel and every Jew who came to believe in the First Coming. “O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?”

Bossuet’s remark to the effect that “a prophecy may be fulfilled without its contemporaries knowing it” is correct so long as one understands it properly. If it’s taken to mean “without *all* contemporaries acknowledging it” it would be nothing but balderdash, in fact, tantamount to saying that “*the Church* wouldn’t know it”. It such a thing were true the prophecies would be quite futile, nothing but mummery, or at the very least, unworthy of God’s wisdom and compassion. “Now learn a parable of the fig tree. When his branch is tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at doors”.

16.- **The actual Revelation**.

The Book of Revelation is becoming very fashionable. Léon Bloy wittily remarked that when he wanted “to know what’s the latest news, I read Revelation”. Not a century ago Renan could mock the Apostle John and make fun of his “delirious and inordinate oriental imagination”, miles away from the serene balance and elegant composure one can find in Greek imaginations. An army of two billion soldiers, all of them horsemen!—that may not amount to more than a modest war expedition by the Parthians along one of the Empire’s frontiers (and that wasn’t even properly verified), the blasphemous Breton exclaims. A darkened sun, a bloody moon and the stars falling from heaven!—surely they were no more than a couple of inoffensive eclipses, comets and meteorites… Whole cities collapsing in an instant and becoming ruins! A third of mankind perishing! Renan savours these absurd impossibilities in the Age of Progress, Civilization and Modern Science. He knew nothing about the atomic bomb that modern science was already begetting. In those very days, Victor Hugo was already saying, what he knew not: *Je songe a tout l’enfer qui tient dans un atome,* in other words, predicting the atomic bomb like Balaam’s donkey.

In his literal comment to Revelation, (a Lacunzian summary published in Rome with an *imprimatur*), Bishop Eyzaguirre identifies the sixth angel sounding the sixth trumpet as a prediction of a great world war, divided in two parts, with a twenty-year interval between them, which we have witnessed and suffered. It is premature to say that both World Wars are a literal fulfilment of such a prophecy because the Prophet indicates two billion horsemen *at the front* (this is the cavalry, the storm troopers of other times) and numbers its victims up to a third of all humanity. Of course, in World War II, if one counts all those involved in the war-effort one could perhaps say that two billion people were involved. And a third of them died or were injured in the conflict—but a third of those involved, not of all mankind.

But many respectable military critics such as Capt. B. H. Liddell Hart and Iturrat, for example, deem perfectly possible, and even probable, a Third World War, after a shorter truce than the last one, and that this time the conflict would be between whole and *unified continents* and not *unified nations*.[[13]](#footnote-13) Fulminant Air Forces, explosive robots, mass conscription, including women, and compulsively drawing small nations into these wars (a modern technique that has already been tried successfully and that nowadays definitely belongs to warfare art), make possible—at a modest estimate—the extermination of three times more people than what we’ve already witnessed.

Antichrist has now found his tool. It’s only a matter of time before “what withholdeth” him, *the* *Obstacle*, shall be removed, and then Him, Who is to Come, will come.

17.- **Exegetical conjecture**.

If then, things stand like we’ve said, perhaps one could surmise for the near future the following events:

1.- The assembly of all Jews in a single national fold, the reconstitution of the Kingdom of Israel in their ancestral home, a pre-condition of their mass-conversion to Christ. “They shall look on him whom they pierced”.

2.- A swift concentration of political and economic power (totalitarian capitalism) and the constitution of great international groups, anticipating a Universal Antichristian Empire, or First Beast.

3.- Juliano’s persecution, the establishment of a false religion similar to Christianity, the making of the Pseudoprophet, or Second Beast (by no means impossibly an Anti-Pope, or a great religious genius of some sort), or perhaps simply Freemasonry or Socialism. In Italy Christian Socialist parties have been founded.

4.- Nero’s persecution, this is to say a persecution under the law, imprisonment, Nuremberg-like trials, killings and execution of those who do not have the mark of the Beast upon their foreheads (apostatic faith profession) and on their hands—perhaps handling coins with sacrigelous inscriptions, as reportedly happened in Nero’s time.

5.- Diocletian’s persecution, this is to say the economic oppression of all the faithful to Christ, who may not buy or sell or trade, forbidden to do so by way of black lists controlled by a world power.

6.- Two witnesses showing up who fight Antichrist wielding divine powers, maybe the chief of old Christians (Enoch) and the chief of converted Jews (Elijah)— possibly the last Pope and Israel’s last Viceroy—both of whom would be martyred.

7.- The defeat of all saints everywhere amidst a universal apostasy, for “when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke, XVIII:8).

8.- A brief period of international peace, of a horrendous peace made up of terror and unjustice, presided by the Lay Emperor of the Universe, Antichrist.

Writing about the atomic bomb, a journalist from our paper *La Nación* in the 18th November 1945 edition says that thanks to President Truman’s “Christian inspiration” the atomic bomb became the instrument that will bring peace to the world. Wish it were so! But more probably the atomic bomb will be the technical instrument through which the world will be unified in terror just as the Christian Socialist Party represents the means of unifying the world through falseness. Following the prophecies, both elements cement the Great Lay Emperor’s power and make possible the mysterious *Obstacle*’s withdrawal.

All this, unless we witness a great reaction from Christianity’s side (Europe’s conversion such as Belloc, Dawson and Meinvielle hoped for) with a great victory for the Church (such as great theologians like Holzhauser and Billot predicted) initiating the last golden period in history before the end (the *Church of Philadelphia* or Love between brethrens) and postponing the times of the last Church, the *Church of the Laodiceans* or Judgement of all Peoples.

Having said this, these are not truths to be blindly believed as if coming from our Faith, but only as conjectures of the things that could happen; these speculations are but private interpretations that any Christian can licitly try. And more so, if he’s a Divine.

18.- **The Seven Plagues**.

In these times when the Church will have to suffer so much from the world, the world will not have it easy either; on the contrary.

The City of God and the City of Man, whose strained relations over the centuries will have reached their peak, will both suffer as much as human creatures can bear, and yet a bit more; the difference being that while the Church’s pains will be parturient (“I saw a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered […] And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron”), the infidel’s pains will be of everlasting death, the beginning of the fires of that furnace reserved for those who are to be lost.

The Book of Revelation figures the pains reserved for infidels through Seven Vials poured upon earth by Seven mighty Angels who administer God’s wrath through Seven Trumpets that the seer describes. But the difference between the Trumpets and the Vials is this one: that the Seven Trumpets signify the spiritual causes of all these pains (we take them to be the barbarian invasions, Islam, the Greek schism, Western schism, Protestantism, world wars and Antichrist), while the Seven corrosive Vials that the other Angels simultaneously pour out upon earth represent the woe and punishment—fittingly, owing to such spiritual destructions.

If Eyzaguirre’s interpretation to the effect that the Sixth Trumpet and the Sixth Vial represent world wars is right, it naturally follows that the other six are those that I’ve numbered.

The Seventh Trumpet and Seventh Vial are evidently the very End of the World—invariably, the manner in which the twenty Visions in Revelation close. But it must be understood that these Visions do not follow a linear progressive sequence (natural to epic or narrative poetry) but as a concentric plot, or better still, a helical winding up, a typical scheme found in all oriental prophecies. Each one of these Visions set out a step forward from its precedent but all of them finish depicting the Second Coming, the Book’s main subject. [[14]](#footnote-14)

So, from our point of view, the First Plague figures syphilis; the Second one, international discord and war; the Third one, the poisoning of social and cultural life and the rift between classes; the Fourth, modern science’s perverse and destructive deviation; the Fifth depicts the destruction of all politics and the statesmen’s helplessness; the Sixth is nothing but a World War; and the Seventh, the Second Coming.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Similarly, the way we see it, the White Horse in the Third Vision figures the Christian Monarchies that ruled from Constantine up to Napoleon’s times; the Red Horse symbolises the Great War and a whole period of “wars and rumours of wars” and of “armed peace” periods such as those that followed Napoleon’s wars; to my mind the Dark Horse figures our tender times after World War II, with its Crisis and Shortages; and finally the Pale Horse—why pale? Is it death’s colour or the colour of Antichrist army’s race?—signifies the Perfect Closing.

19.- **The grievous sore**.

By way of illustration, let us take a look at the First Vial, because this is no treatise, only a sketch; and we cannot explain everything, only briefly indicate. He who has eyes to see, let him see (we have another book in the making; not yet published).

The First Plague is “a noisome and grievous sore” that afflicts all of those with the mark of the Beast upon them and who have worshipped his image. The Greek text suggests a terrible and dreadful ulcer (*élkon kakón kaí ponerón*; see Zeller’s Dictionary). Syphilis is one of the worst diseases in modern times, it is cruel and disgusting and nearly always afflicts sinners, not saints (Oh my God! Only yesterday I’ve seen on the train a little six-year old girl with a harelip, a perforated palate—a monstrous jellyfish).

Syphilis as a plague makes its appearance in our times. We don’t say that it hasn’t always been epidemic, but in the sixteenth century it became endemic. Its appearance was so sudden, people believed that it was a new disease. Every nation attributes it to its neighbor. The Spanish call it the “Indian pustule” thinking the American Indians had originated it and that it had been brought over by the conquistadors. Englishmen call it “the French disease”. The French call it “the Sicilian pest”. Italians have it as “the French ailment”, Polish as “the Russian infection” and the Russians as “the Persian malady”. It is also called “lues” which means pestilence or “avariosis”, signifying degeneration. Syphilis is a devilish and astute pest. Left to its own devices it goes straight to the nervous system and the germinative plasma, attacking the individual’s vital nucleus and the species. Just like original sin, it also hits man’s descendants producing a chain-reaction that causes awful havoc around the patient’s world and incalculable repercussions in his future. A single man with this ailment could infect the whole of humanity. A single prostitute’s shoal of spirochetes could spread buboes, tabes and syphilitic ulcers to every Uruguayan and Argentine inhabitant. As some contemporary biologist see it, possibly tuberculosis, cancer and neurasthenia.

Of course, we’re not saying that the terrible *treponema pallidum* immediately cause these three ailments. It is a well-known fact that such is not the case. All the same, if André Suarès it to believed, it is quite probable that parental syphilis predisposes people to these scourges—they are *degenerative* as well as infectious; and that, without this proneness, could but rarely occur.

Up to date no specific cure has been discovered for these three sicknesses; and modern science will never find one. Those dazzled with the invention of penicillin and all the devotees of the New Religion of Science will wait in vain for a miraculous vaccine for the treatment of cancer, tuberculosis and neurasthenia. They haven’t paused to reflect that penicillin and the rest of modern medicin’s remarkable breakthroughs can stay infections—only in robust organisms; but in no way strengthen, let alone regenerate them.

Carrel says that modern medicine diminishes infectious illnesses but increases degenerative ones. The outcome is that modern medicine will only increase the number of feeble, valetudinarian, ailing and senile people. Read if not “Lysistrata” or “The Woman of Tomorrow” by Ludovici, the English physician.

Generally speaking, syphilis attacks those who worship the Beast’s image and have their forehead stamped with its mark. These days every Argentine magazine systematically publish an *artistic* photography displaying a barely dressed Hollywood prostitute—even *Don Fulgencio,* a magazine that professes to be adequate for the Christian home.

That’s one of the Beast’s images, proposing them to our adoration with the evidently sacred name of *stars*. The proper name in plain speak is the one I’ve just used.

May the wrongdoing they do to innocence fall one day upon their heads: the millstone hanged about the neck.

The curse isn’t mine, it belongs to Holy Scriptures.

20.- **The New Jerusalem.**

Enough with visions of curse. You can interpret the six other plagues; it’s easy to do.

Revelation closes with a vision of the New Jerusalem. There are two new Jerusalems, the heavenly and the earthly one—the latter being our mother.

Heavenly Jerusalem is the actual congregation of all the saved; in other words, what we call Heaven, wherever that is. The Prophet sees them under an altar, crying for vengeance against the unjust and murderous powers of both hell and the world; *not* as the French poet Victor Hugo saw them, praying to God to have pity on scoundrels like himself.

“And I saw under the altar the souls of them that sere slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on earth? [...] And it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, which should be killed even as they were, should be fulfilled”. Heaven is a vision of God and a unifying and coalescent possession of the soul by the deity. However, in a certain manner, holy souls cry out for their bodies, their substantial forms.

But this heavenly Jerusalem, which exists since Christ “descended into the lower parts of earth” the very day of this death, is not the earthly Jerusalem that the Prophet now sees descending from heaven “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”. This other one is “a new heaven and a new earth”. It is the “tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God [...] because He (God) said Behold, I make all things new”. It is not God’s spouse but the Lamb’s *bride* that comes down from heaven with a light like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. It is a measured and fortified city with great and high walls, with twelve doors and twelve foundations with a perfectly cubic form. The sun that shines on it is none other than the Lamb’s light, a pure river of water of life runs through it and on this side of the river and on that a tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of nations.

The Seer describes it in corporal terms and promises it for the End of Times, after the Second Coming. Therefore, it is an exegetical error to identify it with heaven where the blessed souls dwell and are perfectly happy for ever and ever. These two cities are described differently, the earthly and heavenly one.

I would very much like to describe it. But who could do it better than St John could?

I wish I had Fr Golia’s eloquence. In Rome, 1930, on Easter day I listened to a homily about Heaven, preached by Fr Golía, in those days a celebrated Jesuit. (It was said that Mussolini was there too in unrecognised guise, but I didn’t see him. All the same, the Church was full of military and Roman aristocrats). Golía preached a long, loving and pleasing sermon on human nature’s final perfection in the future life—that and nothing else, is heaven—that made us laugh and cry at the same time. He said that only with the removal of all earthly evils it would be paradise. He described the main earthly evils such as heresies, disagreements, lies, war, travails, uncertainty, sorrows, sicknesses, old age and death. And after that he wittily and lyrically glossed—while at the same time, he jestingly remarked on the old pious old women who wouldn’t stop murmuring and fidgeting, moving their chairs around and not letting the rest of us listen properly—the Prophet’s promise:

*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes*

*And there shall be no more death,*

*neither sorrow, nor crying:*

*for the former things are passed away.*

For my part, all I can say is that if I happened to be relieved for my weekly neuralgias, the newspaper’s sub-editor and this hot and sticky weather, it would be heaven for me. Although it’s also true that as soon as that happened I’d feel discontented again and would begin to dream with other heavens and loves: because that’s the way we are. But that Easter day, while I listened to Golía… well, I must say that my eyes were swimming in tears.

After that, Golía began to number every earthly joy, purifying and subliming them, just to show how the new things in the earthly Jerusalem shall be, where *Christ will reign with his saints for a thousand years*.

After the *First Resurrection,* there is a period of a thousand years in which Christ shall reign with his martyrs. Some interpret that this will happen before Christ’s Second Coming (the so called *evolutionist* exegetic school) but other think that this will only take place after that (the so-called *Millenarist* school of thought).

Millenarism is a divided school. Those who interpret the Millenium in a carnal or Jewish sort of way—technically known as *Quiliasts—*have been condemned by the Church.

21.- **Tag**.

I better hush up now since I feel quite incapable of describing Heaven. In my present circumstances I feel deeply inspired to describe hell, or in the best of cases, Purgatory. My description of Heaven would be a dark night, my solitude in it and a bronze dome around it. Right now, if I were to write a theological poem, it would be more like *Les Fleurs du Mal—*in which a poor reprobate and martyr of our times described his inner hell—never mind the “Divine Comedy”, third part.

Suffice it to say that the New Jerusalem is a hundred times better than the best thing that has ever existed in this world.

Following Boethius, St Thomas says that everlasting life is “a perfect possession of all things forever and ever”. Man’s life is dual, although not double; a life of the soul (the soul is body’s sense) and life of the body (the body is the appearance of the soul); even when these lives are not quite separated or superimposed, in this life one frequently finds them at odd ends, violently contrasted and torn between each other because of man’s vicious oscillation between them: a mystery that made Aristotle groan.

The world’s Redeemer who “reformed our bass nature, configuring it to the light of his own body”, delivered to the torments for our sake, has saved the whole of man, body and soul, and with that the whole of nature, created for man.

In a sense, Christ owes it to Himself to restore Earthly Paradise if it’s true that He will repair improvingly, as it is written, the whole of the serpent’s damage. And what’s more, perhaps that is why the Book of Genesis says that Paradise was “shut down” after the fall, and not “destroyed”.

Paradise lives on as an unsaciable homesickness in all Adam’s sons, prompting them to the conquest of all elements, inducing them to march forward, inspiring their feats; and in present times, having them in a frenzy and making them rave with new towers that would reach the heavens.

Every love poem evoques Eden. I know quite well that *theologians* don’t like it to be so; but that’s the way it is, and so it is stamped on Holy Scriptures. All great poems should be titled like Milton’s, *Paradise Lost*. Without Beatrice, Dante would never have been able to imagine heaven.

During their seminary studies, divines used to imagine heaven as a place full of palm trees and birds, without cold or hot weather, where one could sleep excellent “siestas”. When I was young, I used to represent it to myself as a beach by the sea and nearby a house with horses and metaphysical books, an image I now find not so good as the former one—the one with palm trees. But as I’m sure that if I forge a better image I’ll be in hot water with Censorship, I much prefer to go to my betters and remember the accursed Charles Baudelaire’s famous images in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (I *Bénédiction*).

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Here Castellani argues *currente calamo* (as in a gale) in favour of the Cross as the only answer to the great mysteries of Evil, Sin and… well, Love of course. This piece first appeared during the ‘50’s in a magazine from Buenos Aires (*Dinámica Social*, but we haven’t managed to identify the exact reference. We have taken it from an Anthology of his works—*Castellani por Castellani*, Mendoza, 1999, Jauja, pp. 308-314).

Not by eloquence, nor by dialectics

When a young man, I was an enthusiastic debater. But while I used to revel in it, 30 years have gone by and I’ve have had my more than enough share of debates over my works—even with my “censors” at the Society (if and when we can really call them that. If we’re only talking figuratively, then another word is needed here).

But approaching religion in this manner is something I simply no longer enjoy. In fact, it’s a useless endeavor. Those with religious objections, for the most part know nothing about the subject and one can only recommend them a good Catechism. If they really want to know, they’ll read it; if not, they’re just debating for the fun of it, making the discussion futile—even dangerous.

To those that on a ship or a train come up to you with “But Father, what about this?”, one shouldn’t answer. Instead, one should intensify the objection, stoking it to a point where your inquisitor is persuaded that one knows all about his queries, that one “feels” them as much, if not more, than himself. That is to say, one must increase his hunger, his love of knowledge—or perhaps, even create it. For if such hunger does not exist, giving one the solution will only be a waste of time.

Having said that, one must answer that God in his divine nature cannot suffer due to the damnation of the condemned, nor with the sins that preceded their punishment and caused this eternal affliction, because His nature is immutable and in no way subject to men’s passions. To want Him to suffer is to want to change His nature, to want to change God into a creature, which is quite impossible. It is a very grave mental vice and a widely scattered one at that, and it is called “anthropomorphism”: that is to say, conceiving God as someone like or identical to man, a very common error among the ignorant such as Jorge Luis Borges, for example.

These days, one frequently meets people who ask “What do you think God is like?” with the explicit intention of accepting his existence or not, as long as your answer is in accordance with their tastes. But his existence comes first; so if his existence is a fact, whether I accept him or not is quite irrelevant. By denying him I do not destroy the fact that he exists (instead, I destroy myself.)

If God exists, one must swallow him just as he is. Jacques Rivière wrote very sensibly to Claudel: “If he consoles or not is something I’m not interested in just now. Before anything else, I want to know if he exists or not”.

To take the position that, “If I happen to like God and find Him consoling, well, then I might believe in him”, is an absurdity one should never bother to argue against. If God exists and does not suffer, I have no alternative but to say: “I don’t like it and I can’t quite understand it, but it’s a fact and I have no choice but to accept it and make the best I can of it.” After all, this is what we regularly do when faced with the laws of Nature or the reality of the human condition. Try, for example, to deny the existence of a polio case or a hurricane; see if that will get you anywhere.

Yet preachers are continually telling us that we “offend” God with our sins—and to “offend” means to “wound”. All mystics assert that God suffers with and for those condemned to Hell. Even Kierkegaard wrote that when God “abandoned” his Son (“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”), God the Father suffered terribly for it. So how can one reconcile these with the image of an imperturbable God?

As we shall see, in a certain way God *does suffer* because of all men’s sins and their consequences. In what manner? Two, actually: in his Son made Man and in the Order of the Universe, which is Himself.

I.-

God took Human Nature, condemned and fallen with all its consequences, and paid for its sins: He suffered for those sins a nearly infinite sum of humiliations and pains. (In a certain sense, we could even drop the “nearly”). This is what we call Redemption.

A well-known ungodly Frenchman (Stendhal) wrote “Luckily God doesn’t exist—otherwise we would have to execute him”—on account of the existence of pain.

And yet, God does exist, was made flesh, and in fact, *was* executed.

The Roman Church Fathers, beginning with St. Ambrose, explained Redemption with a judicial metaphor: God took all men’s “debts” and transferred them to His Son made man and afterwards punished Him; that is to say, He settled the account. The Son willfully accepted this universal debt and paid it with his Passion, Death, and all the rest of his acts while He dwelt among us: a life that is, in a sense, an infinite humiliation, to descend from God to man—as St. Paul puts it *exinanivit semetipsus*, He stripped Himself, becoming nothing (Philippians II:7).

The Romans were of a juridical turn of mind and easily understood the legal metaphor—all the more so because St. Paul’s took it further saying that Christ was nailed to the cross *chirógraphum decretum* “blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us” (Colossians II:14).

This “judicialism” passed on to Western Theology (not to its Eastern counterpart) and so Redemption was explained more and more in terms of a “contract”, “debt”, “transfer”, “bill”, “payment”, “compensation“, “sentence”, etc. The formula that Borges stumbled upon: that “Infinite punishment corresponds with an offence that is, in a certain sense, infinite itself”, belongs to this tradition. Yet over the centuries this vocabulary became formulaic, withered, petrified, conventional, and, in the mouth of some effete preachers and theologians, in the long run quite unacceptable.

On the one hand, God appeared implacable (one who must levy recompense, one who cannot pardon, and who cannot abandon retribution) and, on the other, he comes out as totally unjust: that one should suffer for the sins of others while those who benefit from this remain blithesome, now cleaned and freed from any payment—I mean, *some injustice!* A thing like that could be expected from a tyrant like Dionisius of Syracuse.

“All comparisons come up short”. A legal comparison, especially if one forgets that it is only a comparison, encourages this misconception: that Christ has already suffered for our sins, that we haven’t any need to suffer, that we have been forgiven and that all that is required is that Christ’s merits be “applied” to us, like a garment that covers our wounds: we are “justified”, and through Faith we are attributed these merits of Christ. This is Luther’s doctrine (if it can be called a doctrine), who of all theologians is the greatest simpleton, the most coarse and vulgar of them all.

How, then, did Christ suffer for the sins of us all? Christ had to suffer and die this way literally through the action of Sin. Sin, iniquity, and evil are to a degree in solidarity: sin coalesces, piles up, propagates, pushes, moves... and ends up crucifying an innocent Christ, its victim; by accepting and bearing this, he destroys all its consequences. That’s Redemption, materially speaking.

Explain this.

Evil is not static, but dynamic; as is Love that attracts all goodness. They have a “social dynamic”, because they have an ontological dynamic. Plato, in a prophetic inspiration, wrote that if a completely just man happened to appear in the world (a man he describes in detail) then all men would unite together to torment and murder him: the iniquities of all would gather for such a purpose. Plato thought that such a thing had happened to Socrates: that he had died through the sins of Athens. What he described in the future had already passed. Yet he was thinking, at the same time, of one greater than Socrates, a man who would take on himself all the world’s sins. He spoke of Christ without knowing it; and he spoke well.

Evil, just like good, is, as the Classics called it, *diffusivum sui*: it communicates, it sticks, it propagates and bounces until it ends up with one who accepts it and returns good in place of bad: there Evil dies. All the iniquity in the connected universe (because the whole of humanity is knitted, so to speak, in relationships of good and evil) concentrated itself in one place in the world, Palestine, where it formed a sharp point, the Pharisees; and that point went toward Christ. It’s as a bullet going first through three men then losing momentum in a woolen mattress where it finally remains; that happens to Evil when it finds no more resistance.

If a man receives something evil and then returns it to the world, the evil will increase; if he keeps it, the evil will remain with him and eventually be passed on to others, even the innocent; but if instead he returns goodness in place of that evil, then the evil dies there and then. If a man cuts off his enemy’s arm and the enemy returns the deed in kind, you have two maimed people. Or, if the second can’t manage some way of revenge and is left maimed and destitute, then the pain might be shared by his wife and children, reducing even more people to misery; and perhaps the misery will yet be passed on to other neighbors, irritated and inconvenienced at their pitiful state. This is easy to understand. This is the infinite migration of injustice—*motus perpetuus*—that cannot be stopped; not even by Justice, only by Love. I’m not saying that justice should not be applied to the wicked, only that Justice by itself is not enough.

Christ was in actuality the victim of all this sin: all the sins of the past that bred the sins of his era, and all the sins of the future, which He foresaw. He cured them through suffering, baptizing his Gospel through his passion, rendering it efficacious for all future times.

So God suffered for all the world’s sins and, because of eternal damnation, he suffered really and truly in the Garden and on the Cross a pain equivalent to that in Hell. There isn’t a sin in the world, be it however small, that isn’t stained with a drop of Christ’s blood, Christ who is God. There is not a single person in Hell for whom Christ didn’t suffer really, truly and physically.

Those sins that occurred after Christ were not the material cause of His death, but they are the material cause of the suffering of Christ’s Mystical Body—in which we all partake. The consequences of these sins—the pain—passes from man to man till they find a true Christian ready to suffocate them in his heart, accepting them in union with Christ, “in our flesh completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church,” as St. Paul has said (Colossians I:24). And as the patience of Job, Abraham and Anna did truly help and console Christ fortifying Him in his Passion, so too, Christ suffered then every material consequence of future sin (in pain) that would eventually fall back on every one of His living members.

Face to all this, if you feel like saying, “I do not accept it, this is too metaphysical”, the only possible answer is “This is a fact; if you go to Hell by your own fault, little will it matter whether you accepted it or not”.

II.-

Now to something yet more esoteric: God suffers from men’s sins against the natural Order, which is not different than He Himself. That’s why to sin is to “offend” God.

Sin destroys the natural order of the Universe. Such natural order is not an external thing, an invention whereby God would have said something like “I want things to work this way or that. And if not, lo!” in the manner of tyrants. The order of the world is nothing but God’s action as Regulator, his activity of Creation, Conservation, and Providence—that is to say, one single, continuous action, not external but intrinsic to the natural order. He who sins, acts against this order and (God permitting) destroys it. So if God could conceivably suffer, He’d suffer. If He could conceivably be destroyed, He would be exactly that—by sin.

In other words, the Order of the Universe belongs to the very nature of things which are united one to another by a tight net of causes and effects, means and ends, conditions, occasions, and consequences, that make up one “single”, solid thing. This is what the word means in Latin: *versus-Unum* (towards the One). Have you ever meditated on the significance of a “natural community” between all men? It is of the utmost importance. Here you will find the roots of our duty to Justice and Compassion.

So anyone who wounds this Order of things in any way (and only man, who is free, can do such a thing) acts against it; so much so that if it were possible, the whole Order would be destroyed just like the “chain reaction” of atoms disintegrating themselves that physicists describe. Sin acts against the very nature of things, a nature grounded and cemented in the very nature of God. It acts against Love, because God’s nature is Love.

But God does not suffer, and is not destroyed. God suffers through his creatures, even irrational animals, whose lot it is to bear the material consequences of this disorder (pain), getting everything out of balance while desperately seeking to re-establish the lost equilibrium. So this time it is not only Christians who suffer “with Christ” but all men and the whole of Creation, subject since the first sin to the terrible throbbing of this pain, are once again in search of natural equilibrium, everyone, Christians and heathen, sinners and saints, adults, children, and even beasts.

Those who use this pain to restore in themselves the equilibrium of justice, are saved, and consequently are freed from this pain for ever. But those who do not, are not freed; and because of this are *miseri miseria non utentes* (miserable people who don’t even profit from their misery): they remain eternally out of balance, this is to say, subject by their own will to the law of expiatory pain, not by a “Decree” from a God wanting revenge, but by of the very nature of things.

Moral nature is like this: any disorder breeds pain and pain delivers those who accept it from that disorder; and to those who do not, it establishes itself in them in a permanent and incurable way. Even in this life we see it happen, that an unremedied sin begets new ones. The old ones become habits, habits make vices, vices breed perversity, which in its turn revels in doing evil things for their own sake, and perversity becomes obstinacy, for which there is no remedy: a horrible image of Hell, that is not in the center of this planet as they say, but in the very center of such a man’s obstinate soul.

Truly Christianity has not been invented to console, it has been invented to frighten in a terrible way. Only later does it console. Tell this to your friend.

III.-

Sin is a God-killing act; and I freely admit that this is a very difficult mystery; let us not ask for too much. But however inscrutable, this mystery finds justification in the reestablishment of order in the moral universe, rejoining in harmonious unity different and till then irreducible elements, while giving at the same time an acceptable solution to the problem of pain. As long as one considers sin as only the violation of a “Law”, such an awesome punishment remains incomprehensible; because it is above all a crime against Love. The sacrifice on the Cross is not simply “reparation of a debt” because in addition to Justice, Love is involved also. To a crime against Love, Love answers in its own way and according to its essence through an infinite gift... Where then will Creator and Creature be joined, where will the debtor meet his creditor? Their pain is a common one. On the Cross.

We are in the midst of this immense tragedy, in the heart of the Sacred Trinity. How come? In God Himself, in a kind of incommensurate storm? That seems incredible to us because we imagine God as nothing more than a good, reasonable, intelligent order. But that is not the first definition of God; before anything else, God is charity. He is Absolute Love. With our miserable hearts, let’s try to understand this unheard of movement. (We live comfortably, unconsciously, in the middle of this terrible whirlwind, so much so that the smallest deviation of this inflexible sphere would, if possible, disrupt and smash the world to smithereens.)

For Love nothing is insignificant, everything matters. For Love the tiniest parts are precious, urgent, necessary. Hence the smallest infidelity infuriates. Reason recedes when confronted with this prodigious calling that has fertilized the chaos, a calling that would blow away the most powerful of all angels as if it were a tiny piece of driftwood, a calling coming to die, pleading, insatiable, unquenchable, in the ears of a poor little man.

I don’t know—it seems that I’ve ended in a rather Bossuet-like manner, so much eloquence isn’t mine. But to acquiesce to these truths that exceed all reason and are only known through Revelation is not something one can acquire through eloquence or dialectics. They ask for an open heart, and then even a child with common sense will understand them. *Da mihi amantem et quod dico intelliget.*  Give me a lover, and he’ll understand what I mean.

\*

In 1954 Fr. Castellani delivered in Buenos Aires a series of 13 lectures to a riveted public (my father assisted to most of them, and told me that the theatre was always full to the brim). We have chosen one of them to give a sense of how this priest spoke in public—and the sort of things he said. These lectures were only published nearly half a century later (*San Agustín y Nosotros*, Mendoza, Jauja, 2000, 276 pp.—and it’s from that book that we translate this one—pp. 91-107).

The Destruction of Tradition

Please bear with me that we’re already half way through. I give these addresses with my nerves, not with my memory—“with my soul” someone could say, but no, it’s with the nerves alright, I won’t be beating around the bush. That’s why I find these lectures so difficult to deliver, not like Sciacca, say, or Julián Marías, who can lecture with their memories, lucky them.

It’s rather unpleasant to find oneself speaking like a prophet of misfortunes, knowing all the time that to act the part of a soothsayer proclaiming good tidings which always brings home the bacon; and anyway, I would always prefer, God willing, to be an incompetent prophet of doom.

But the destruction of tradition in the Western World is glaringly obvious, and denying it is equivalent to closing your eyes while crossing a street. In any case, opening our eyes could be the cure, following the poet’s lines:

*Prior to any other one,*

*the first of all medicines*

*is to identify the disease.*

When I talk of Western World’s tradition I’m not referring to the “Institute of Tradition” that functions on Güemes street, nor to the famous “Argentine liberal tradition”, nor to the famous “culture” that nowadays makes so much brouhaha, nor to folk music, nor to popular music of any sort broadcasted all over the place, day and night, nor to the Vatican, nor to Latin America, nor to “the mother country”, nor to any of all those uses people give to the word “tradition”—a useful word to include in speeches and banquets and a warrant for the creation of perfectly useless bureaucratic organisms.

So, what is tradition then? Better establish first what it is not. Is folk music tradition? Nope. Someone has said that folklore is the research of the peculiar way in which each country expresses its own idiocy; and, if you ask me, I find this definition adequate when I review everything that I find in common people’s singing, plays or sayings, and, worse still, in the belief that *that* is a great thing. Popular art, when good and selected, is an interesting thing; but in that case it always reflects the preceding great art which is never a popular creation, but is received or assimilated by it, filtering it through its own idiosyncracy and adapting it to its own customs. It must be said that before the actual decay of the fine arts, the simple scraps of an art belonging to better times, handed down to us in simple folk or popular songs, are much better than the unintelligible poetry which we stumble upon in the “Literary” sections of our newspapers… but we mustn’t forget that they are residues or reflections of better times; and above all, we must never cherish the illusion that we’re going to save the Argentine tradition or the Hispanic one flooding the country with radios broadcasting day and night a deluge of tangoes, jazz pieces or rumbas…

On the other hand, how can there possibly be an Argentine liberal tradition, since Liberalism was Locke and Hume’s creation, two Englishmen from the XVIIIth century, by which time there already was a tradition solidly established in this country? For that matter, liberalism in its original form has disappeared from the world, and been replaced with other equally anti-traditionalist movements.

So, does there really exist an “anti-tradition”, which is to say, a *bad* tradition as opposed to a *good* one? No, nonething like that: strictly speaking there is no “anti-tradition”; what we find in history is an unrelenting attack on the contemporary traditions, but always coming from different quarters, sometimes even opposed to each other. You’ll never find a permanent “heresy” (to put an example taken from religious tradition), there are thousands of heresies—Pelagianism is the opposite of Manichaeism— and Luther is poles apart from Rousseau; you can only tie them by their tales, like Samson’s foxes, and more often than not they take to bite one another; to take an example: in his letter to Mr. Tronchin Voltaire requested the death penalty for Rousseau.

So, there’s no progress for Humanity, only one great castle constantly under attack from all sides? No, that’s not how history works. *There is no rectilinear and uniform progress* in the sense that the Marquis of Condorcet understood it—the myth and dogma of indefinite Progress. But there is a certain type of progress or, to put it more precisely, something more like two parallel and yet invisible lines of progress. *“Tell us, when shall these things be?”* the disciples asked Jesus. We find the answer at the end of the book of Revelation: *“The time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly.”* This is to say that there’s a certain progress in Humanity, but this must be properly understood: the progress of which I’m speaking happens *in men’s inner self*—that “inner self” of which we have spoken so much; and consequently, good and evil imbue more and more the “inside” of men, and because of that they become more conscious and therefore more refined and concentrated. In this sense, Kierkegaard is more “interior” (or “inward wise”) than Saint Augustin; and on the other hand, Sartre, for instance, is more of a pervert than the worse heathen authors: compared to Sartre, Petronius looks as innocent as a newborn babe. Humanity marches toward History’s dramatic dénouement, a drama which includes one protagonist and plenty of hostile enemies.

Tradition is that ideal world of human values that we inherit when we are born, without deserving it… and for which we show ourselves pretty ungrateful. But not all that we inherit belongs to tradition. A son inherits from his father a house and, say, a tuberculosis; the house is tradition—tuberculosis is not a tradition. It could be that tuberculosis runs in the family, but that sort of tradition must be interrupted as soon as possible. But nowadays, speaking morally, homesteads are being broken and tuberculosis is being cultivated, so to speak.

Here, we’re going to consider the destruction of tradition taking two examples, divorce and the social wars; and the invisible bond that links them with the destruction of philosophy by way of the “idealist principle” that has revolutionized philosophy something like two centuries ago.

These days philosophers are traditionalists or anti-traditionalists. In 1950 it fell upon me to talk in the city of Salta about the state of philosophy in these times—something that looks quite chaotic and that is not easily classified, not even if you take up Bochensky’s classification in seven or eight that he exposes in his well-known little book. I started by classifying philosophy basically in two: *traditionalist and anti-traditionalist* in the belief that all philosophies fell into one or the other category, including very technical philosophies as those of Husserl or Heidegger; and from what I’ve been studying since then I can only say that I’m more convinced of this than ever. The reason is quite clear: philosophy, even the most abstract ones, turn up in the world *in certain circumstances*; like all things human, philosophy is *historical*, irrespective of the opinion of those who take her to be eternal; and the present historical situation of the world, what people nowadays call the “current crisis” is, on the one hand, a progressive destruction of western civilization and, on the other, its defense. The Catholic Church, that is above all traditionalist, does nothing new since the Council of Trent [[16]](#footnote-16): it contents itself to defend what remains: *confirma cetera, quae moritura erant*; and the successive ruptures of the religious tradition (Luther), of the philosophical tradition (Descartes), of the political tradition (Rousseau), and consequently the breakdown of the social tradition, not to mention the artistic one, are being generated from different quarters with diverse motives. A house is a house: those who want to take it by assault may well come from different places, but those defending it respond from its very center.

What is tradition? Tradition is that ideal world of human things that we inherit when we are born, without deserving it—and for which we seem to be rather ungrateful too. For me, when I was born, tradition was represented by a firmly established family, some Italian grandparents with a mind full of European legends—my Grandmother used to tell me about the Council of Trent in an entirely legendary form—full of tenacious customs and even one or two healthy obsessions—(with the persistence of never changing tradition’s badges), Don Quixote and Alejandro Manzoni’s books—and those of Montesquieu!—that belonged to my father’s book collection; our parish priest, Father Olessio and his little church; the legend of Father Metri preserved in my uncle Felix’s mind, and the Rosas’ government preserved in the same head (“Bloody hell… I’m telling you, we should go back to Rosas’ times!” the Austrian used to declare when he was pissed off—an Austrian all right, but as you can see, pretty much ingrained in this country), the Vienna Waltzes played by the local aficionados, the local theatre *Società Italiana Unione e Benevolenza,* where I saw several plays like Rusiñol’s *El Místico* and Guimerá’s *Tierra Baja;* the nearest State Secondary school, Casariego’s Geometry treatise, Grosso’s History, and the guitarrist Higinio H. Cazón with his improvised folk songs. Doesn’t seem much as traditions go; but how could I ever invent all of that, or, for that matter, the whole of my Reconquista town? Not even all the Argentine people, put together—not in a million years, could have done it: it was already there, already invented, “brought” to us, in other words, received and steadfastly passed on. We cannot create the civilization into which we’re born: but we can destroy it—in our very selves, for a start. Believe it or not, but *it would be easier for men to create the whole physical universe than to produce the moral and intellectual universe that makes up Humanity’s vacillating heritage.* Hard to believe, perhaps, but that’s how it is.

Now, here’s the thing, if things are like that, how can we destroy it?

These days we all seem rather boastful about our “culture” and all sorts of people keep bombarding us with the word every other day… but what is culture anyway? Culture is nothing if it isn’t the effort to preserve and enliven and invigorate a certain tradition. I find this definition by a friend of mine, Ernesto Pueyrredón, perfectly accurate. An Englishman who doesn’t understand or appreciate Shakespeare is not a cultivated Englishman. Of course, to become a cultivated Englishman understanding Shakespeare may not be enough, he may well need quite a lot more; because the English culture doesn’t conclude with Shakespeare. And then, a certain culture (that first of all appears as a national occurrence) is not a legacy of one single country—not even of one single religion. Christianity carefully acquired for itself the whole Pagan tradition—not to mention the Hebrew one. We have seen who went about this, Saint Augustin, and we’ve also seen how he did it. *“Every single good thing that the philosophers have found, belongs to us”,* Saint Clement of Alexandria used to say, parroting Saint Paul: *“All things are yours”*, and *“Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, it is all yours; and you belong to Christ”* (Philippians 4:8 and 1 Corinthians 3:22-23).

Unless he understands Shakespeare you never could consider an Englishman cultivated, and that in itself requires him to go way back, submerge himself in the paths of History and Poetry, and after that, to “traditionalise” himself, if you admit the neologism; but on top of it all, he will have to learn many other things, sometimes everyday ones, like *keeping silent in hospitals*. I know about that because once I was sick in London. Over here, I’m always sick but fortunately I don’t need to go to an Argentine hospital; I mean, as a patient. Perhaps one day I’ll have to go, may God give me patience enough. Over there you’ll find in a certain room a human being in agonizing pain, then, in another, a poor devil who hasn’t slept a wink all night, and other here and there suffering from some ailment or other while the nurses are boisterously horsing around, laughing their heads off in the halls and corridors, medical doctors and junior physician residents talking to each other at the top of their voices, and then visitors going from one place to another as if strolling in a public park. I’m not going to mention one hospital in particular, but I know that these things happen.

Very well then, that is an example of lack of education, a case in point of callousness, of lack of culture in the worse sense: it is, an example of, forgive me if I use strong words, but there it is: outright savagery. I’ve an idea that the Guaraní Indians took a different view of their diseased; they saw them with other eyes owing to a certain sense of sacredness that they had preserved. We should be trying to rekindle the Guaraní Indian’s traditions. The Greeks of old revered their sick, because they saw the hands of the gods in them: that’s the tradition of Humanity. Culture is the effort to live up to tradition.

*“All things are yours”,* alright. However… does that include modern philosophy? These days some people talk with a certain arrogance of *“integrating modern philosophy into Christian philosophy”.* When he toured the country, Julián Marías said just that, an idea repeatedly found in his *“Biografía de la Filosofía”*, a not too penetrating nor solid book. Taken by itself the contention sounds rather utopian: it overlooks a huge fact, namely the 18th century rupture of western philosophy’s tradition. One cannot integrate modern philosophy with Christian philosophy, it is simply not possible: conversely, *the incorporation of modern philosophers’ sensible ideas* is… well, a horse of another color. And the alternatives are not, as Marías would have it, between *Scholasticism* and *Modern Philosophy*, the only alternative to traditional philosophy are those that we could here call *dissident systems*. The syncretism that Marias longs for… would be equivalent to speak of the *“Unified Production of Poisonous Mushrooms Company (from a superior point of view, beyond its toxicity).”* There cannot be one single industry of mushrooms, in every case you’ll have to have two entirely different ones: one for human consumption, the other one dedicated to the extraction of aconitine and amatoxins for pharmaceutical uses. If you unify the edible mushrooms with the poisonous ones, the poisonous ones will come out on top.

Anyway, what I want to attempt here is to consider the present destruction of tradition through three examples related to one another: the institution of matrimony (and divorce), the social wars surrounding private property, and modern philosophy that these days everyone seems to be covering so much subjects. They are like three tottering ramparts designed to protect a universal tradition (and not only the Western one). *“The world has ceased to be Christian!”* Julian Marías exclaims. Well, in absolute terms, not so; but in a relative sense, you might say so.

*“The races are degenerating! The races that survive are those that prosper; the races that survive are those that are more numerous; the most bountiful races are those in which families show to be more strongly linked, in every sense!”,* exclaimed Louis Marin, my teacher, a deputy for the Third Republic, in a course on “Monogamous Marriage” that he delivered in the Ethnology School in Paris, to which I assisted in 1933, and from which I took notes that right now I have in front of me. He was right, of course. And it’s also true that the anti-traditionalist movement associated itself with divorce as a banner for the social struggles of the time (this was discovered and proved by the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico), and that those two things constitute an alarming signal in any nation, a symptom of a malignant tumour.

But it also must be said that when we find ourselves in presence of a symptom like that, it is because it has been preceded by a development or incident in the empyrean skies, a certain disturbance of high principles: the haunting appearance of an anti-traditionalist and destructive philosophy; things like Epicureanism, Academicism and the Pyrrhonism of Saint Augustin’s Rome (the very Rome in which patrician matrons adopted the habit of counting the years as they passed not by the Consuls’ names, but by the name of their successive spouses, if Juvenal’s narrative is correct) and, still worse, following the August Emperor’s example: the venerable tradition of “sacred matrimony” had been obliterated by the patrician Romans; only to soon realize with horror how the plebeian began to rebel (all of which were eventually corrupted or simply suppressed).

But the Church picked up Rome’s tradition.

Those of you who have read Roman Law thoroughly know that in Rome there existed a lawful concubinage (a bit like King Alfonso the Wise from Spain who tolerated paramours), giving way to two matrimonies, one indissoluble, a constituent element of the Roman Religion; and another, different one, dissolvable and of an inferior legal status: you must have heard about the *confarreatio* and *coemptio* institutions, of marriages *sine manu* as opposed to marriages *cum manu,* which is where the custom of asking for a daughter’s hand comes from. And perhaps you’ve even learnt Modestinus’ definition of marriage: *unio stabilis maris et feminae ad omnis vitae consortium et integram rerum divinarum communionem,* in other words, “the permanent union of a man and a woman with the purpose of consorting completely in every order of life apart from sharing all divine things”, a definition I defy any Christian to better; being perhaps a too lofty one; for matrimony’s immediate aim is only referred to by implication with the words *maris et feminae*, male and female: *the communication of divine things* was for this pagan the ultimate purpose of marriage; and by that token the patrician matrimony was Latin Religion’s basic foundation; and this conviction belonged to the Roman tradition, and not only to the Romans, but also to all “flourishing, numerous and surviving” people as Louis Marin used to say: Latin or Germanic, Europeans or Asiatic, primitive or developed—as Professor Marin authoratively proved in his lessons while permanently protesting with all his might against France´s *denatalization*. The Christians of Rome armed with Christ severe admonishments against divorce had to invent nothing. Saint Augustin carefully preserved humanity’s tradition.

Giambattista Vico, a Neapolitan philosopher, relying on linguistics, philology and a sharp study of mythology, meticulously reviewed *how Roman society originally took form;* and afterwards (in his extraordinary book *Scienza Nuova*) extended his conclusions to other historical communities. “Sacred marriages”, namely those celebrated with solemn and public rites, monogamous and indissoluble, under the control of the whole tribe, were literally at the heart and represented the unique center of their whole religion fundamentally worshiping domestic gods and Penates. Families so constituted were guaranteed private property and other religious, social and civic rights: they were the *paterfamilias*, the *Patres* from where the word “patrician” comes from, as well as the senators’ names: not “founding fathers” as we rather pretentiously say nowadays, referring to people who barely deserve to be called sons of our fatherland, but simply *paterfamilias.* To these families so solidly built, other families not so solemnly established, were added in the character of *clientes* (which basically means “the protected”), those who hadn’t accepted “the religion of sacred matrimony”, and therefore, subject to the *vagus concubitus* as the poet Horace expressed it, or to the *Venus vaga*, meaning simple cohabitation, to be more precise. These couldn’t benefit with the property of the land nor exercise civic and religious rights except by attaching themselves to a family sacredly constituted. This is how the division between *patres et clientes* came into existence, later known as patricians and plebeians. According to Vico, the *patres* gradually reduced the latter to a lesser social rank, owing to the very nature of their greater fortitude, steadiness, peace and prosperity that usually results from a solidly established family. All of this, naturally, in the Roman way: namely the unsocial and noxious classes were simply exterminated, and those who appeared to be more easygoing were admitted under their protection, but at the same time, under their domain (a word that derives from *domus*, in other words, belonging to a home or household) and in this manner following what Vico considered to be the Roman mission, as Virgil once put it:

*Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos*

Spare the conquered, and battle down the proud.

Here’s one of Vico’s texts:

“And finally, after a long age of *pitiless gigantic beings* who lived in infamous promiscuity with things and women, those that Grocio termed “ruined” and that Pufendorf called “desolated”, to save themselves from the “violent” as Hobbes designates them—they run away just like beasts chased by terrible cold, and in search of a place to live in, they sought refuge in strong pales, those dwellings from where, these ferocious peoples, once united in family societies, sallied and began to kill the *violent*, those who had violated their possessions**—**and gave protection to the miserable beings who sought their shelter; and being naturally heroic as they were, because conceived under the auspices of Jupiter, among the Romans the Heroism of Virtue distinctly stood out, excelling in this over all the other peoples of the earth, precisely because they relentlessly practiced those two rules:

*Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos.*

And here we should reflect deeply if we want to understand how few were these wild ferocious savages who passed on from their brutal freedom to conform a human society, considering that to succeed in taking the first step (which is to concoct a family) the sharp incitements of an animal lust were necessary, as well as the forceful brakes of terrifying religions to keep them so, as we have already seen; and from where sacred matrimonies derived—the first friendship ever seen in this world. That’s why Homer, to emphasize the fact that Jupiter and Juno lay together, says in heroic earnest that between them they “celebrated friendship”, what the Greeks called *philia* a word that derives from *phileo*, in other words, love. And that’s why the Roman called their sons *filius* and the Greeks designated their friends as *philius*; and the Greeks also, altering only one letter they used the word *phylé* for tribe; and this explains why we still see genealogical threads in most coat-of-arms that the Jurisconsults started calling *genealogical lines*…”

Simply put, philosophy taught Vico that the word “love” had begotten the word “son” as well as the word “friend”, “tribe”, and finally “lineage” the very basis of any “tradition”; the words themselves indicated the origin of these things; even when in Spanish sometimes they may sound very differently.

In the Province of Salta I have had the opportunity of verifying Vico’s law. In the lower classes concubinage is the rule, even when they marry in a church, because when they do, it’s not with *indissolubility* in their mindsbut only with the ceremony and subsequent celebration as the true object; on the other hand, among the upper classes, matrimony still maintains maximum respect, adulteries and separations unsettle the whole tribe, creating what is known as a “scandal” and the guilty parties are punished, being practically excluded from “high society”.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Now, I’m not saying that Vico’s law applies always and in every circumstance, nor that this, my description of it, is anything more than approximate. But the phenomenon is pretty much the usual thing, to the point that Vico’s law seems to be vindicated—that humanity’s tradition includes this equity paradigm by which those who assume different responsabilities, also enjoy different rights as well as they assume different duties—and in that sense, well, *noblesse oblige*, and we must take the fat with the lean.

Now, having said that, we must keep in mind the fact that there always will be cohabitation and paramours, and therefore a basic sense of fairness and elemental political good sense indicates the necessity of regulating concubinage, first of all to keep those who go for it on this side of the law, and, most importantly, so that they don’t bother or rule over the rest of us (because that’s exactly what’s happening now, with some outlaws pretending certain entitlements over those who abide by the rules. And sometimes they get away with it).

When the property root belongs to a home or household, and I mean by this when property is held as a good for the whole family and not for an individual only, then there won’t be social wars; but for the very existence of stable homes (*domus*), solid marriages are absolutely necessary; and their establishment must remain uncompromising—any crack in the building will eventually bring the house down, finishing in “free love” or marriages *à la* Hollywood. *History teaches us that divorce and social wars even if not entirely dependent on one another, at least always make their appearance simultaneously.*

The famous “social question” doesn’t concern us here—it has been studied and analyzed to an excess in tens of papal encyclicals, let alone Sociology books. The papal encyclicals are fine and include excellent things—but they have never been put into practice; on the contrary sometimes they have been used against their very purpose, applied by capitalists or socialists; because you can always twist a truncated text to make it say whatever you want, wishing the water to your own mill. These days there are only two possible solutions to the social question, *slavery* or *charity*; as a matter of fact, those are the only two answers to this question that history has displayed over the centuries: or Christianity of Paganism.

The heathen world fixed the labor problem with slavery: slaves were considered human beings that were forced to work all their lives for a master in return for their sustenance. Usually they were not badly treated: they were valuable property, like a horse or a cow; and their owners worried about their health for their own benefit—more than a modern financier bothers about his employees. A big financier means “someone who has acquired a solid financial position”; which many times simply amounts to exploiting men in order to become *monstrously rich*. Where are voices like John Chrysostom’s, and Saint Vicente Ferrer’s or Bossuet’s whose outcry was heard all over Christendom: “At the bottom of all fortune lies a crime!”? Those voices don’t exist anymore. Those with a “solid financial position” have taken care of that. Little by little those voices have been silenced or reduced to a pathetic groan.

But I digress. My point is the following: there are no more than two general remedies to what is now called “the social question”, and those two are charity or slavery: by charity here I don’t allude exclusively to alms or simple handouts, but to the charity that rules over justice, a charity that presupposes justice and that conceives justice.

Now, these days, the world’s trend is towards slavery. How can you say a thing like that? We’re not in Russia! But if you take a better look, you’ll see that the whole world is neo-pagan; therefore, if slavery is finally established it will happen in a new form, a disguised slavery—and, worse still, abominably, it will appear in a Christian guise, with broken scraps of Christianity, with hollowed Christianity truths turned into rags. If through “social insurance”, pensions, compulsory saving banks and free dental services for everyone—plus a free, obligatory and official education system, and in that way subsistence for the mass of workers would be guaranteed in return for a life of labor… well, briefly put, if they come to *exchange freedom for safety*, we would be in the presence of a new Paganism, a new slavery, more redoubtable than the primitive one. And this process of Neopaganism is well underway. Who’s to stop it?

Usury and the exploitation of men have always been around; and also, let us not deceive ourselves, laziness and resistance to any type of work; but in other, better times, strong voices were heard denouncing this state of things. “At the bottom of all fortunes lies a crime”. We here refer not to a great fortune gradually acquired over three or four generations just like patrician Romans did. No, here we’re concerned with big money acquired in short time. That cannot happen without involving criminal wrongdoings. One cannot enrich oneself in a short time unless pocketing other people’s work—frequently through bribery, a very tolerated practice in Argentina. No man can earn millions of dollars in a year just through working—that is stealing. If there were a man’s work worth millions of dollars, that would be, I don’t know, Beethoven or Mozart’s work, for example, for those geniuses have provided humanity with an inexhaustible treasure; but, well, Mozart lived and died penniless. But not even Mozart (if we follow theoretical justice) would have deserved to earn what Rockefeller (say) earnt; and that is, because if we observe theoretical justice, everyone must earn what one needs according to one’s standing, says Saint Thomas; this is to say, according to his rank. And those who earn enormous amounts of money doing evil? Those are worse than villains. Living in Ferney, Voltaire enjoyed a yearly income of 144.000 pounds of gold. And he reaped all that money doing harm. When a society comes to that, it’s at the brink of disaster. And yes, the disaster materialized soon enough, believe you me.

These days the power of money is huge: Getulio Vargas knows all about it. [[18]](#footnote-18)

A priest that I happen to know told me that he had read a Scottish book called *The history of Money* in which the author proves that money, the capital, that accumulated money has always triumphed in this world. This is historically false: this priest I’m telling you about happens to serve the wealthy and afterwards comforts himself thinking that “it has always been like this, anyway”.

What is true, however, is that money has the power to get the upper hand over *weak governments*. A strong government can always overcome the power of money through political sway; but a strong government, get me right, is not tyranny, not even absolute power; it simply means *good* government. Good governments are always strong, and the power of money can do little against them. Of course if you have a good government it will have to struggle and fight like a lion if it wishes to defeat the power of money—sometimes it will even require martyrdom. Poor Louis XIV (frequently slandered with the phrase historians attribute to him: “I am the State”), became absolutist (as Belloc has demonstrated) under the pressure put on him when he defied the ascendancy of money; but he also became absolutist due to the defection of other forces who should have put check and balances to his own power: the defection of a nobility that became courtly; the defection of a University that became sycophantic; the defection of the French Church that corrupted itself (with quite a bunch of high clerics seeking more and more riches). Alas, the Sun King couldn’t curb the power of money, even if he wasn’t quite outdone by it: instead it all ended in something of a draw. Unfortunately, the Sun King was no sun at all, more of a moon if you ask me; he was unprincipled and fatuous. He did particularly foolish things: Saint Thomas says that silliness is one of lust’s daughters.

We can’t say, because it wouldn’t be exact, that the current social wars are *directly* engendered as a consequence of the rupture of sacred matrimony, like it happened in Rome; but in any case, what one can say is that the two things seem to emerge together—and that they both share a common cause which is the anti-traditional philosophy called liberalism; born in the bosom of English empiricism, which, by the way, was a consequence of Descartes’ anti-traditional philosophy. The first divorce project sprouted during the French Revolution from the legislative Assembly; but it would be only enacted with the Third Republic’s Naquet law. On this matter, Protestantism set a bad example with Henry the Eight and Luther’s approval of Prince Hesse’s bigamy; but they didn’t however, make a law out of this; just like Napoleon the First who used it for his own benefit but didn’t let others take advantage of it. The French Revolution bequested a divorce law, but Napoleon never regulated it or profited from it: he forced five venal Cardinals to declare his marriage with Josephine void. *In England, when divorce appeared, capitalism had already solidly established itself, the proletariat was a fact, and the war of classes soon broke out.* Divorce is in the interest of capitalism; it’s in its very philosophy. On the other hand, Karl Marx in his *Communist Manifesto* is a good witness to Vico’s law, because he makes the case that the dissolution of sacred matrimony among the bourgeois is in communism’s best interest. “You accuse us, communists, of propitiating *free love*?”, he says, *“But you yourselves live in a hotbed of adulteries, legalized or not. In fact, you live in a free love system”*.

These social ruptures, the product, partly, of passions, are supported and acquire consistency with the disruption of tradition, by way of an anti-traditionalist philosophy. I won’t elaborate here, because that’s part of a future talk. But suffice it to say that with Descartes, philosophy underwent a *total revolution*, an imperceptible one at first, but today quite a blatantly obvious one: Descartes turned philosophy upside down; and a lot of Christians, Cardinal de Bérulle, Malebranche, and lots of Jesuits, enthusiastically acclaimed this revolution as the dawning of a “Christian Philosophy”. Étienne Gilson says that Descartes represents the major revolution in philosophy since Aristotle, before Kant: he could have said since Aristotle without more ado.

Descartes’ principle, that was later known as the “idealist principle” seems a harmless and indifferent thing; while in reality it’s more than a revolution, it subverts the very way of thinking: *In the first place, we know our ideas—and things, only afterwards*. The good bourgeois will ask here, “What do I care, if, when all is said and done, I eventually get to know things, just like they are? In the long run, what I’m interested in is, seizing them, to take advantage of them”. Pay attention: that is equivalent to putting knowledge before the very being of things… In the old philosophy *in men’s case* the being of things comes first, knowledge only comes afterwards: in God’s case we know that they are one and the same. Knowledge used to be shaped after things, and that’s the way to know God; now they pretend that we can come to know God as a result of the idea of God, because the first (and as a matter of fact, the only) thing that we *can* know actually are our ideas. Well, how important is that? Abide with me, we shall soon see how important that is: *that* will end up putting man prior to God and finally do away with God. But Descartes is a good Christian, he doesn’t want to suppress God… All right: he may be a good Christian but he’s a bad philosopher. And by the way, can a very bad philosopher be on the other hand a good man? He who’s really good, is good in all respects—especially at his trade or profession. As far as I’m concerned, regarding the knowledge of God, Descartes is as good as Judas.

These monstrous turrets built by modern philosophy, towers actually built *against* heaven, make their appearance, all of them, as the end result of the disruption of philosophical tradition; a breach that is, when all is said and done, akin to the tower of Babel, the effect of a sin of pride. It pretended to attribute to man’s uncertain intellect the very markings of angelic intelligence, that is to say, *intuitive, innate and independent* from things. This rebellion against human reason is comparable to the angel’s rebellion: *non serviam*, I will not serve. And the consequence was, as a matter of fact, that it became unserviceable, useless. This rebellion finds itself at the very beginning of the current crisis and its true name is “Rationalism”; and it constitutes the worse of all the breaches of tradition, second only to the rupture of religious tradition achieved by Protestantism. Its consequences have been significant. Philosophy has come to the point of contending that it is the human intellect who makes things, that *we create* reality. You can say that that is demential, and that’s because they don’t express it in so many words. But, yes, that craziness is what idiotically moves the world today. Collect your thoughts, think it out carefully and you’ll even find the atomic bomb as the perfectly logical outcome of Decartes’ proud principle. *Initium omnis peccati est superbia,* pride is the very principle of everything evil.

What can we do if everything is being destroyed like that in a series of continual destructions, one after the other? *“Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die”* says the Angel of the Church in Sardis (in the book of Revelation), which amounts to be saying “hold on to tradition”, though the Greek is a bit more energetic: *revitalize* the things that remain, things that are ready to die.

But this is inhuman, we are sent to fight for things fated to die, to battle without hope of victory—for us, this is impossible. It’s impossible for man if he remains on an ethical level, because in that battlefield fight and might amount to more or less the same; but it’s not impossible for a man on a religious standing, because he fights for God, and therefore he knows that God’s victory is a foregone conclusion, and that he was born to be used, perhaps even to be defeated—but then, what does that matter? We have been born to be used! By whom? Not by the State, but by our Father who is in Heaven!

“Because you knew you’d never make it, that’s why you’re so distinguished”, said a great poet, that certainly never adopted a guise like that, that was never seen as great. We must fight to the end for all things good that still remain, over and beyond the fact that these things will all be “integrated again in Christ”, as Pope Pius X used to say, with our own forces or by the uncontrollable power of Christ which will be displayed with his Second Coming. *“Truth is eternal—and it will prevail, through my own agency, or not”.*

That is why we must oppose the divorce law, oppose the new slavery and the ongoing social wars, that is why we must also oppose the idealistic philosophy—and all that without knowing if we are to win the day or not.

*“God doesn’t require us to succeed, only not to be overcome”*.

*“The Church is everlasting!”*—say the Christian democrats. The Church is eternal in the sense that Jesus Christ meant; but the external organization of the Church, say the Vatican, for instance, is not immortal: that organization has been vanquished and reformed several times. And in the end, the Church in that sense, will be broken.

What in effect is eternal is man’s soul united to God… united to God with the purpose of being *used*.

\*

In 1953, mainly to keep the wolf from the door, Fr. Castellani delivered 13 lectures in Buenos Aires which proved to be a huge success with the paying public: here was a local priest displaying a unique scholarship in this part of the world. Contrary to his usual modest self, this time Castellani exhibited quite a bit of his amazing erudition: here he not only displayed his knowledge of Theology and Philosophy (as might be expected), but also showed his strong hold of Psychology as well as his acquaintance with a lot of literature—the better part of Argentina’s, Russian’s, English, French, American and Spanish, as, to a certain extent, this first lesson illustrates. We offer our translation from the first chapter of his book, first published more than forty years later—a written rendition of his conferences which one can find entitled *Psicología Humana*, (Mendoza, Jauja, 1995, 296 pp.).

But an additional note from the translator is here required because of what follows: when I got to render Castellani’s short biography of Helen Keller included in this conference, I discovered (much to my unease) that some of the facts he relays are not quite accurate. For instance, he says that Helen Keller graduated from the University of New York in the year 1900, when she actually acquired her degree in Radcliffe College, Cambridge, in 1904; but he also makes the extravagant claim that she was awarded doctorates for her knowledge of five different languages when the truth is that she acquired quite a grasp of English, Greek, Latin, French and German, a notable feat in any case, but, of course, her B.A. degree has nothing to do with that (a quick search on the Internet reveals that Radcliffe never awarded PhDs in Languages or Humanities, anyway). There’s also a somewhat confusing paragraph in Castellani’s lecture where one is never quite sure if he’s referring to the French case of Marie Heurtin or Helen Keller. As any acute reader will see in the translation that follows, I’ve tried to clarify this by setting the record straight, rectifying Castellani where he gets his facts wrong and amending his statements where they prove to be incorrect. I appeal to the reader’s indulgence hoping that all this will not overshadow Castellani’s merits and refrain from applying here the old legal maxim, *falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus*, nor regard my amendments as an exercise in dishonesty, if not another case of *traduttore traditore* (in this case not only betraying the reader, but the writer as well!). [Translator’s note].

Does the Soul Really Exist?

“Psychology consists in looking into your own soul as opposed to observing the reality of things” (Chesterton). But, how come? Doesn’t the very spirit also belong to the reality of things? And generally speaking, the spirit itself, is it not by any chance the very reality of everything?—or, at least, can we not say that it’s one of its *more important features*?

This talk will deal with the object of Psychology, an object that Chesterton believed to be a narcissistic exercise, as if Psychology were no more than the vain mirror of a coquettish female.

To reproach Chesterton like this is perhaps justified if referred to various psychologies; because that is what Psychology looks like nowadays, a plural entity. These days, to refer to “Psychology” with a Capital letter, on its own, just like that, is a mistake. Briefly put, such a thing simply doesn’t exist. The answer to the reproach we’re dealing with, consists in affirming the reality of the soul, and a prodigious reality, at that. *The reality of the soul!*—exclaims an amazed Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychologist. It is the title of one of his books, probably one of his best. He believes to have discovered *“the reality of the soul”*, denied throughout the last century by the so-called “phenomenalist” psycologists.

The XIXth century made quite an attempt to devise a “psychology without a soul”. That’s how Lange’s book (1828-1875) was entitled, and that’s how one could qualify countless investigations—some of them very fine, like those from Mewmann on memory. They discarded the existence of any such thing as a substantial soul, perhaps due to philosophical prejudices (Positivism), sometimes because of methodological qualms (Actualism); but, then, they worked with a false notion of what we understand by *substance*.

Naturally, they never denied the existence of conscience, or the very act of thinking itself, or of the Ego, because that’s impossible; instead, they pretended they were studying only the *acts* (this is to say the *phenomenons,* namely the appearences) and these never considered as a steady stream, but strictly as *acts*, meaning something like a string or succession of phenomenons adopting different guises or demeanors; while rejecting (sometimes furiously) the very idea of a soul’s substance—which they considered nonsense—or only granting it in some cases as a sort of bud, when not simply resorting to other metaphors such as a sparkling bonfire, if not a wind, as it were, or a certain breath—or perhaps even a certain something releasing ether, so to speak. Some people called this “Metaphysics” but it triggered among themselves unreasonable indignation. *Oh philosophi, non transcendentes imaginationem!* (“Oh you Philosophers who cannot transcend imagination!”)—Saint Albert the Great would have exclaimed.

But in fact, who were on the receiving end of their outrage? Were they against the Metaphysics? Not so, but against the Physicists; this is to say, against the Pre-Socratics who in fact considered the soul like a wind, like some kind of water, like a fire or a “harmony”. But the Pre-Socratics were lost in time, they were much more irritated with the uneducated masses and the spiritualists who believe that the soul is nothing but a misty image of oneself.

Quite a few of these phenomenalists (and one of them was Jung himself), were intellectually honest enough to actually study all and every phenomenon, and that thoroughly: the result was that they stumbled upon something that we will not call “substance”, much less “immortal spirit”, but simply *“permanency”*. Please pay attention to this innocent word, which is bound to give us great surprises. They found a “permanency” in psychic phenomenons unparalleled in the rest of the kingdoms of nature; for instance, the fact that an *act* belonging to your babyhood period could well resuscitate in boyhood, now transmuted into a neurosis—except that “to resuscitate an act” would be an inexact way of putting it, given that *all* our acts resuscitate. But then, *resuscitate* in not the word we’re searching for either, since all our acts *follow* us, they don’t die. Now, if not even “follow” is the word we need, seeing that *all* our acts, without exception, in fact, *constitute* us, what then?

Well, here’s the thing: things being as they are, we inevitably face an exceptional permanency, a bizarre thing, a mind-boggling *permanency*. If you don’t believe me, observe what follows: if I declare that every one and all the sparks from a tinderbox constitute the tinderbox itself; or that all the bangs from a combustion engine constitute the same engine, I would be, of course, talking through my hat. And yet, that is how we come up with this very strange and very obvious and very evident *permanency of the soul*.

*“In our acts something always remains”*: this assertion is self-evident, so much so, that one cannot deny it without affirming it: and this, because if I were to say *“nothing remains from our acts”*, would I not be, by the same token, trying to stay my claim, wishing it to remain? That is, why would I say such a thing unless I meant it to be heard, understood, remembered and transformed into a rule of conduct?

So we have indisputably established that it is evident from our acts that *some permanency* remains; the question now is to find out how does that weirdly, insane, permanency works. In these lectures I intend to talk about psychology resorting to *facts*. You’ll find all the abstract reasoning you need in books; what I find necessary now is to bring them to life through the observation and the understanding of reality, and that, by analyzing specific, concrete circumstances. The object of psychology has been defined in a hundred different ways by countless authors, starting with Aristotle who contended that it was “*the form of a physical organic body potentially endowed with life*”—and ending with Brentano who says that it is nothing but “*acts of consciousness characterized by their intentionality*”. Pretty good definitions in themselves, but they´ll tell us nothing until we finish our course.

Now, as promised, to the facts! Let’s try to see the reality of the soul or the Ego’s “permanency”, or the importance of psychology in the “*subterranean spirit*” as Dostoevsky had it, pointing to the background of our acts, to the “pit” as Saint Theresa would say, or “the underground” as the Russian understands it. There is something people nowadays call subconsciousness, and that really exists; but it’s something much more wondrous and difficult to understand than what one would be led to imagine: a dust cloud of acts, or a pile of warm mud, like the boiling “*solfataras*” fields you come across in Naples.

The subterranean spirit

There’s a short novel by Dostoevsky that will serve us very well while we consider the “reality of the soul”. They say that in that brief novel—quite incomprehensible for the masses—Dostoevsky reveals himself as Freud’s forerunner; I don’t know about that. He describes an abject soul: there couldn’t be a soul more abject than that one; and that soul is his own. But, what a permanency, what a coherence more resilient than steel is revealed in that soul, a soul to all intent and purposes in perfect shambles!

“I’m a sick man… I’m a bad one. I’m perfectly unpleasant. I think I have a liver condition though I must admit that I know nothing of such things and cannot pinpoint my ailment. I do not, and never have, taken care of myself despite the fact that I have Medicine in high regard, for I’m deeply superstitious, or, in any case, superstitious enough to put my faith in Medicine (on account of my education y could allow myself not to be superstitious, and yet, there you are, I am…). No milord; if I don’t take care of myself that’s only out of pure evil: that’s how it is. Can you not understand it? Well, milord, I do, and that should suffice. Undoubtedly I could never quite explain whom I harm in this case with my badness. I can perfectly understand that, in not taking care of myself, I hurt no one, not even the doctors; no one in the world knows better than myself that I harm no one except myself. It doesn’t matter; if I don’t take care of myself it is out of pure wickedness. So, you say it’s the liver? Well, then, may it blow up! For a long time, some twenty years, I´ve been dragging around like this, and now I’m already forty years old…”

This is a weird novel, and not a very pleasant one at that (apparently it wasn’t even quite finished); and this, due to its characters and its style and the action itself and its disagreeable and sordid atmosphere; and yet, it is tremendously powerful, which is the hallmark of excellent literature. Dostoevsky here comes up with the idea of putting together two social (in chemical terms) irreductible molecules such as the *homo criminalis* and the *mulier prostitute,* the purpose being to find out if a miracle can happen through love’s magic; but here no miracle occurs: that spark will spring up later, between Rodion Raskólnikof and Sonia Marmaládofa. Here we only find impotence and wretchedness, and it all ends in infinite moral misery.

The uneducated masses say: *this is a failed work*—a philosopher would say: *this is a portrait of human abjection*—a psychologist: *no, it portrays his subconsciousness*; a theologian would say that here’s a brilliant novelist… a true theologist who has drawn a powerful symbol of Sin, of a human soul in the clutches of sin, doing a sketch of the “dead souls” that Gogol had talked about: in the first part, he describes original sin, in the second, he delivers a symbolic description of actual sin. The villainy, the abjection, evil itself, have never been more vividly and completely portrayed than in this piece of auto-dissection; and of course, it must be remembered that at this time Dostoevsky was in a terrible, practically suicidal, self-destructive state: it was forced by penury that he wrote this piece of “The Flowers of Evil”, *avant la lettre*.

Dostoevsky now felt worse than when his time in Siberia; he had ended in an ill-mannered way his unhappy love affairs with Pólina Súslova, had lost up to his last penny at the roulette table, he was taking care of his first wife, María Dimitriefna who was bedridden and agonizing with consumption, the world was hostile to him and he himself was sick (adding sarcasm to pain) with hemorrhoids: “I cannot sit, I cannot stand”.

“We have been born and it’s been a long time since we were born from parents that live no more, something that with the passing of time is more and more pleasing. We get used to it. In a little while we’ll want to be born from an idea. But enough is enough.”

A lot of French “Existentialists” have picked up quite a bit from Dostoevsky; but Dostoevsky never sins against hope. The very attitude of *confession* manifested by the underground character, shows, as such, a hopeful disposition. If the human soul were nothing but pure misery, it could not contemplate its own misery, let alone regret it.

Dostoevsky seems to say that here we reach the depths of the human soul, and that this is the permanency of our acts. But granting that this is the bottom of the human soul, certainly this is not *all* of the human soul: there’s a *duality* here, inasmuch as it can describe itself with rage and contempt. That’s obvious. I’m not saying that there are two souls (that was condemned by the Council of Vienne) but it feels very much like it. If the soul were nothing but vileness, it wouldn’t be able to realize its own baseness; but if it *does* realize it, then perforce it should include some nobility. That nobility remains invisible in his “Notes from Underground”; but then, the whole novel springs from that very nobility. *A nobility terribly hurt and afflicted that unravels in its wounds.*

St Teresa’s soul

And that’s how we arrive to St Teresa’s “pit”, portrayed *d'après nature* by a brilliant poet. The soul is comparable to a castle surrounded by a pit with Seven Mansions (or circles, or rooms). What a contrast! We come out, released from a murky underground and we now find ourselves on our way to a diamond-like castle, to a palace out of a fairy tale. In St Teresa’s work the noble or lofty section of the soul is revealed to us, the hidden part in Dostoevsky’s novel; conversely, here the pit remains concealed. But in any soul you’ll always find that both things are real.

St Teresa of Jesus! Miss Teresa of Cepeda and Ahumada! Her works reveal a luminescent soul. In the last years of her life, Teresa’s soul, that “dust cloud of acts” that the phenomenalists talked about, simply constituted a miraculous reality: the castle was flooded with a light that shone through all its windows. In the Complete Works of St Teresa, edited by Lafuente, in Volume V, one can read extracts of the beatification process where innumerable witnesses testified to the fact that observing her externally, one could perceive the wonderful light that shined within her. Years ago, reading this left me with the strong impression of the miraculous.

See if I can give a glimpse of that impression of the *sublime* that I experienced some years ago when contemplating this lady, 53 years old, that begins to write letters because she starts “foundations”: she is like three women all rolled into one, or even better, something like three combined gigantic men (meaning three human beings). In the first place, there’s a contemplative, a reclusive who lives permanently in the presence of the Holy Trinity (watch it, not of the Crucified Christ or Our Lady of Fatima, but of the Holy Trinity itself), not with an imaginary vision, but with an intellectual one, in other words with a wonderful “presence” following her day and night… you couldn’t understand a thing like that, neither can I; but it’s a fact, historically attested.

Next to this, an intellect absorbed by a delirious love which finds itself a solitary, absolutely lonely like a single bird on a roof: here’s a heart in love with an infinite number of people, men and women, nuns and laymen, with the most personal love, the most tender and most effective love that one can possibly imagine, with an intensity of passion while at the same time adoring with unparalleled delicacy, showing at the same time moderation and infinite reach, a blind and clever love, distributed according to the degrees of proximity of each one of those surrounding her, unsettled by no one, disturbing no one—and yet there’s enough for everyone. In the end, here we find a more passionate and loving heart than George Sand’s creature (Aurora Dupin), freer than a bird, more ardent than a volcano and better regulated than a clock. Now, if you cannot make heads or tails of all this, don’t worry, I’ve lost the plot too.

Finally, next to the absorbed contemplative and the most affectionate of ladies we find a great man of action, as they nowadays say, or, more accurately, an enterprising man like people used to say, of high exploits, like the Spanish conquistadors (some of which belonged to her own family) who accomplished feats that amazed all and sundry.

But what was she undertaking? The enterprise of founding a religious order while simultaneously reforming another one, nothing less. Years ago, Dr. Nerio Rojas used to tell his pupils (including my brother Luis): “I myself, in the asylum where I work, can count five or six St Teresas of Jesus…”, in other words, women plagued with mystic delirium. I answered my brother back saying “Tell him to let them loose, see if they can reform a religious order”. Reforming a religious order is an awful thing, even more difficult than governing a country! Well, there you are, here’s the third St Teresa of Jesus, the one with an active life, “the wandering nun” as her enemies insultingly called her, buying houses, keeping accounts and counting the pennies (“*And now, believe it or not, I’ve become a haggling person!*”), admitting novices, getting rid of novices, appointing superiors while discarding others, appeasing squabbles and pouring oil over troubled waters, writing letters to Rome, seeing the King, fighting the Pope’s ambassador (the Nuncio), writing books, shunning the Inquisition, travelling all over Castile and Andalusia in all manner of uncomfortable wagons and mules—while contemplating the Holy Trinity—finally dying at the Alba de Tormes convent, at the age of 67, from a fit of love of God, while very upset over differences with an obstinate superior (that’s what has been said. But as a matter of fact, we now know that she died of a much more prosaic death, similar to Dostoevsky’s).

This miraculous activity springs from a soul; and its development is the object of psychology. But that soul wasn’t born that way, being formed instead, bit by bit, or in some cases abruptly—following a walloping itinerary and going through a world of difficulties—braving horrible junctures, as horrible as those described by Dostoevsky in his *Underground*, the whole pit overflowing and flooding her soul, an event that she describes in a handful of words: “*The pit overflowing with so many dreadful things, like snakes and adders and other venomous things that entered with them*”.

Never believe that St Teresa knows nothing about the spirit of Underground; she’s familiar with it as much as Dostoevsky, and perhaps even more so, having stood up to it in deeper ways; but because she vanquished and bound it, she can do without its description. What mystics call “The Dark Night” is nothing else than the process by which the divine fire from purgatory dries the pit or at least subdues it forever. This process is extraordinary, supernatural, and only occurs to very few people: taming the pit through natural processes can only be accomplished by an artist’s work.

Teresa’s bad days were really bad. But, as opposed to most women, she barely complains. In his “Dark Night”, Saint John of the Cross groans and laments himself much more frequently than she. “Women complain, women believe they are sick, women become sick when they want to”—so says the negro. But this woman from the city of Avila is just not like that.

Let’s take a look at her in 1562, when with four companions she founds the Reformed Monastery of Saint Joseph of Avila: in her autobiography she says nothing about this fantastic episode that the American historian William Thomas Walsh has exhumed from the archives to retell it with remarkable mastery: one hell of an altercation as one wouldn’t find even in the comedies of entanglement of that time.

Four fugitive nuns have rented a big house by the banks of the Adaja river. The Incarnation nuns, her old companions, denounce them to the authorities as “fugitives” and slander them before the people as being *alumbradas* (“Iluminati”) or “Quietist”. This produced quite a riot in the town, the gathering crowd creates a commotion and wants to dislodge them and send them back to their original convent. Teresa of Ahumada locks herself in, the mob wants to bust the door down, Agnes of the Holy Ghost faints, the other ones cry, Teresa holds a parley with the mayor at the top of her voice shouting through the blocked door, but refuses to open it unless the judge is summoned, and when the judge finally appears, she presents him through the door hatch with a papal brief, the judge commands the people to back away but the rabble prevents people bringing food to the fugitive nuns and they don’t dare to come out, frightened as they are of taking a beating, etcetera…

This is one of many storms the Conquistador-Contemplative-Passionately-in-Love woman had to face; but this tempest is nothing compared to her inner storms and corporal ailments (*“the worst anyone can go through, so the physicians say… the pains were nearly unbearable…”*). And when these three things come together, the mystical sorrows resulting from the Absence of God, corporal maladies, defamations and inner persecutions… one cannot make heads or tails out of it all. *“Nearly unbearable pains…”* as she submissively puts it; in fact, it was all quite completely insufferable, had it not been for her faith and the grace of God.

What where the incriminations that got to the point of threatening this nun with burning her at the stake, something that made the poor young lady tremble, aware as she was of the Spanish Inquisition, knowing perfectly well that *that* was no trifling matter? If you ask me, the answer is easy enough: basically they accused her of being an “Illuminati”, a “Quietist”, a disobedient nun, heretical and deranged. But if you ask me *why* they accused her, that’s another matter altogether: they blamed her because she wanted to found a reformed monastery, that is to say, where the primitive rule would be strictly observed; in other words, because she wanted for them a rigorous enclosement, more praying and more penitence; without wanting to pass judgment on others, naturally, she only wanted to live her religious life in a more exacting monastery—though, of course, like it or not, initiatives like these always imply a tacit disapproval of those who show themselves somewhat reticent.

*“I was always an unworthy nun; but I never did things like speak through holes”,* says the saint, referring with this to the not uncommon practice of certain nuns prone to make openings in the walls with the intention of talking with their “flirts” (that in those days were called “ladies’ men”), those ridiculous “nun’s love affairs” that Quevedo makes fun of. She simply wanted to save her soul and never quit praying—namely, she only wanted to lead a religious life. And because of this she was persecuted to death, at least during twenty years (for his part, her companion, St John of the Cross, nearly pegged out in Toledo, undergoing untold hardships until he finally perished exiled in Andalusia); but the outcome of all this, of these enterprises and persecutions, was the founding of two saintly Discalced Carmelite Orders (not to mention the Calced Carmelites, mainly reformed by the example of the other two).

Saint Teresa went through terrible worries and fears and was surely endowed with supernatural courage. These were not petty trepidations—to be burnt at the stake is no joke—, they were not unfounded fears and the Spanish Inquisition was no laughing matter.

Why did they distrust her? Well, deep down, it was because of theological reasons that I cannot explain here; but perfunctorily put, they were suspicious of her because of her mystic raptures (ecstasies and the like) *that couldn’t possible occur*, according to the psychologist of the times (in fact, bad psychologists, as it turns out). The reality of St Teresa’s soul defeats vulgar psychology—or to put it differently, the lack of psychology. *“This happens to me”*. No, that cannot be, Science says. So it must be delusion or the devil himself.

Something unusual happened in connection with the first “account” she gave, “of her soul to her confessors”: she confessed to the most learned cleric in Ávila, Fr Gaspar Daza (licensed in Theology, perhaps today we would call him a doctor in divinity), and also shared the very same secrets with her great lay friend, Francisco de Salcedo, “the saintly gentleman”; both of whom, after having read her piece, resolutely came back to her saying that, in their opinion, “it was all the Devil’s doing”, and that she should resist these motions with all her might. She said that if was useless to resist. So both of them thought the *was* after all an “Illuminati” *(alumbrada)* because that was the sort of things the “Illuminati” *(alumbrados)* were prone to say. Consequently, they put a lot of pressure on her and for some time the poor young lady had a lousy time.

She used to say that the *soul* and the *spirit* were two different things (wrong!), she said that the powers of the soul were different from the soul itself, and different between themselves (wrong!), she said that she felt the *presence* of God without any visual representation of Him (wrong!, impossible!), she said that at times her *will* was united to God while her understanding of things felt as if absent minded (impossible!), that her *imagination*, the fool of the house, became rowdy and wandered all over the place; and that she should let it be, without making any effort to restrain it by force. She said that *when one* *prayed in quiet, one thought about nothing*; she said that in the Seventh Mansion the soul blended with God completely, like a stream flowing into the sea, or like two unified flames. And that all these things were *facts*, that she felt them within herself as clearly as anything she could see with her eyes. Wrong, impossible, gibberish, sickliness, deceit, the heresy of the *alumbrados* (the “Illuminati”), the result of a pact with the devil, similar to the case of Sister Madelaine of the Cross who had recently been exposed by the Inquisition leaving the whole of Spain in a state of shock! A poor deceitful and wicked witch.

What Teresa was discovering deep inside her soul was nothing but the eternal and most important problems challenging the Science of Psychology; that she had resolved with experimental evidence. The “half-learned” priests who inspired terror in her heart (all her life she professed great repulsion towards unlearned people, whom would have done better to read their Aristotle, in which case they would never have come up with antics and nonsense as they did). But no, they were reading the “modern philosophers”, this is to say Dun Scotus and Durando. The soul is an entirely simple substance, and therefore their assessments were nothing but poppycock. Fools.

But the reality of Teresa’s soul came out on top. *You will know them by their fruits. The visions of this seer yielded extraordinary and great work;* and all Spain and after that, all Christendom, finally recognized the soul of this woman for what it was: a great castle of diamonds, with a sun within it.

The case of Helen Keller

As a third exhibit, I want to introduce you to Helen Keller—or simply give a sketch of her life—the life of a blind, deaf and dumb girl. She also wrote her autobiography, an extraordinary book. This time I’ll have to deal with it a bit superficially, but it can’t be helped.

Helen Keller, an American girl born in 1880 in Alabama, who 19 months after being born was afflicted by a mysterious fever that lasted for a couple of days, after which she fell into a quiet sleep. But the fever had left her blind, dumb and deaf: can you imagine the utter darkness that we conjure with these three words, blind, deaf and dumb?

In 1904, at the age of 24, Keller graduated as a member of the [Phi Beta Kappa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phi_Beta_Kappa) society from Radcliffe College (in those days, Harvard University’s female counterpart), becoming the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.[[19]](#footnote-19) Besides the “instrumental” languages necessary for a deaf-dumb to communicate (mimical, dactylological, Braille, plus lip reading), she acquired a solid hold of English, Latin, Greek, French and (especially) German. She also eventually learned to speak by feeling vibrations and by feeling the lips interpreting the shape of sounds.

A soul in prison, the psychologists would say. But this *soul in prison* was full of light and could wander around the world, around several worlds for that matter. That this miracle has been verified in the U.S., honors that country.

The first time that this miracle (the psychic freedom of a blind, deaf and dumb person) was ascertained, it occurred in France. In times of the French Revolution, the abbé from l’Epée offered his services to try and educate one of these “souls in prison”, but he was turned down. At the end of the century a nun who went by the name of Sister Saint Medule made two attempts with Germaine Cambon and Martha Obrech that didn’t quite succeed but that nevertheless opened the way to a method. Finally, a nun called Sister Marguerite, a disciple of Sister Saint Medule, pulled it off in the case of Marie Heurtin, establishing a method for such cases. The case of Marie Heurtin caused quite a stir all over Europe, and a lot of psychologist wrote papers about it, including the great Dugald Stewart.

But then, Marie Heurtin never quite matched Helen Keller’s accomplishments: she never, to put it somehow, finished her primary school, and this, probably because Helen counted with a priceless toehold and initial capital: she had seen and heard during a year and a half, and only afterwards was affected by her terrible blight. Marie Heurtin instead, was born blind, deaf and dumb. Her parents and people in general thought her idiot. She was a real beast. She bit, clawed, clutched, hit, and had repeated fits of rage rolling around the floor, biting her hands and pulling out her hair—so much so, that people believed it was a case of epilepsy where, in fact, it was only her soul trying to free herself from her prison cell with what Klages called “the instinct of expression”.

“It was no little ten-year-old girl that one day entered the church of Our Lady of Larnay in the year 1900—it was a furious monster. Since she felt abandoned by her father and her aunt, she fell into a constant fury that didn´t abate until a full two months later: it was a dreadful restlessness, twisting and rolling all over the floor, punching the ground and whatever was at hand, all of this accompanied with barks and desperate screams heard by anyone in the vicinity. It was impossible to leave her alone for a single second, day and night. To calm her down, the nuns tried to take her for short walks with her school companions, but then she suffered fits of fury, throwing herself into the ditch and fighting with such an incredible nervous energy that they couldn’t get her out of it. Very frequently they were forced to call an adult to carry her back on his shoulder while she howled tremendously; and the Sisters all returned in a state of confusion in the face of the worker’s and farmer’s emotions, supposing that they were mistreating the poor thing, sometimes to the point of denouncing ‘abuses’. Every time that her hands took hold of someone near, she immediately felt for the head; and if in place of the school cap of her companions, she touched one of the nun’s rigid bonnet, she would fall once again into one of her fits of rage.”

Once tenderness somehow controlled this fury of hers, the “method” began. It’s simple: in the first place, the mimical language, something universal that lies at the very root of all languages. They had to, in some way, place into that dark soul the idea of a sign. A knife with which she liked to play was the first “sign” she discovered. “This means this!”. “That’s a conditioned reflex”, Pavlov would say. No, for the love of God, not at all! It is something that spills over, that is immensely greater than the brain’s reflexes: it’s the “intelligence”. For her part, Helen Keller says that when she understood the first sign, she understood her tutor’s “intention” and that at that very moment she felt an “explosion of light” within her. Try to imagine what it implies to teach through your hands, with tactile signs, abstract ideas, what Sister Marguerite called “the adjectives”, things like bigness, littleness, space—and later on, infinite, God, death, immortality (in fact the idea of God arrived much before the idea of “immortality” just as Philosophy teaches us). God has given man three things that contain all things: reason, language and our hands. In this case the hands came in wonderfully “handy” for the recovering of language and reason. And to what an extent!

Helen Keller tells us that “in ten years I traversed the vast distance between my first stammered syllable and the sweep of thought in a line of Shakespeare”. She became familiar with five different literatures, enjoyed the great authors, judged their writings wisely, intellectually delighted in their works and, surprise, surprise, revealed that she was happy, very much so! A real wonder. As Aristotle has it, man’s purpose in life is to contemplate.

Helen Keller ended up being something of a linguist and enjoyed, of all things… grammar! An incredible thing, a dumb woman “who knows as much Grammar as Cicero and Homer”, she says. No wonder they say that grammar is the root of all philosophy. She feels happy and says that “in knowledge there’s vision, light and love”. She also says that “happiness consists in forgetting oneself”, a saying familiar to most mystics.

But during her life, not all is happiness. In her life one finds a pit, an underground: “It’s true, sometimes it shrouds me like a freezing breeze, a feeling of complete isolation which keeps me waiting lonely, all by myself, facing the closed and iced doors of life, knowing that on the other side there is light, music and sweet companionship; and yet I cannot get through. I’d willingly protest against His tyrannical decree, because indiscipline and passion still rule my heart; but my tongue (what tongue?) will not utter (with what words?) the useless and bitter words that come to my lips (what lips?) so that they fall back on me without spilling over my heart. There’s happiness in self-forgetfulness.”

So here’s another marvel that I want to point out: in this lady, the pit is a limited one, as in the cases of Marie Heurtin and Marta Obrecht: these enclosed women are good, evil doesn’t seem to touch them. They are “enclosed religious women” like the Carmelites or the Clare nuns; in other words, God forcibly enclosed them in that solitude, and finding themselves in such a cloister, the contemplatives willingly search for Him. The fact that these unfortunate incarcerated (the dumb, I mean) girls, easily achieve the peace, quiet and joy, that for us appear so difficult to acquire, would here seem to be an advocacy for the life of cloistered nuns that we have so much difficulty in understanding: women that don’t talk (verily, an admirable thing!), that sleep scantily and that pray in Latin without understanding what they’re saying, that voluntarily incarcerate themselves, and voluntarily become blind and dumb-deaf! Well then, if we ask ourselves why do they do things like that, they will answer with St Thomas Aquinas: “To diminish the obstacles against contemplation, given that in contemplation one finds happiness.” That’s rubbish, that goes against human nature!

But then we stumble upon this other brutal empirical proof, these desolate, unfortunate “Carmelites by force”, as it were. These wretched women, practically deprived of their very humanity, are good, are happy, effortlessly happy. The soul is an admirable force; and that force is not the outcome of an atomic explosion, but, more like a turbine that permanently grinds, grinds, runs, runs, runs and stays, stays, stays. As the French say, *tout passe, tout lasse, tout casse,* everything happens, everything tires, everything kills; except the soul, the reality of the soul. No one bathes twice in the same river; but the river bathes permanently in the sea and in itself.

So, we conclude that the “soul” is a permanent thing. We already knew that. Have we evoked the *underground spirit*, St Teresa’s pit and Helen Keller’s luminous dungeon, only to be told that our Ego, you and him, are not a cloud of acts, the sum of simple acts—have we paid our entrance fee only to listen to the rebuttal of these charlatans?

The soul is a permanent thing, alright, farewell then. But, your attention, please: how permanent is it, and until when? I started this talk by saying that the question is not a question of arguing over words, but understanding the exact scope, the precise reach of every word. We have admitted the soul’s simultaneous permanency, this is to say, its reality—and its successive permanency, that is, its substantiality: but the final question, the difficult question and the important one, from which all the others depend, is its absolute permanency: in other words, the question is if the soul is or is not immortal!

And here we suddenly discover why the very object of the psychological science raises such a flurry of doubts**—**and how can it be possible to concoct such weird things, like the idea that the Ego consists of a chain of phenomenons, a dust cloud of acts. Behind such apparently abstruse and academic questions lies a hidden question, a question of life and death.

But please pay attention: a question of eternal life or death. And of temporal life or death too, since for no other question more people have killed and been killed than this one. They say that men kill for women, for money or for power; but quite a lot more actually kill each other over the question of the post-temporal permanency of the soul. You don’t believe me? The worse wars are the religious ones; and all the big wars, the mass extermination wars in the end have been religious wars, starting with Troy (that apparently was over a woman), right up to the last World War, that apparently was fought over the “Polish corridor”. But, ultimately, we always find two *ideologies* fighting (in addition to two imperialisms, or two economic empires) and any ideology implies a religious understanding of the world: an ideology is a Religion in itself, usually a false one; because deep down and at the root of every religion you’ll find either belief in the immortality of the soul or its rejection instead, something that applies to psychology too, where you will always find that one or the other conviction constitutes its central tenet.

The Duke Cosimo of Medici used to say that he believed that those who dismiss the possibility of life after death do not even *have* a life before their death. Which is also the case of those who deny the permanency of the soul after death: if they are to remain consistent they cannot but absolutely reject the subsistence of the soul after death.

I haven’t the time to prove these propositions, but they’re sufficiently obvious; psychologists refer to the three roots of Psychology: religion, natural sciences and social behavior: the upshot of these three roots are what is known as rational or philosophical psychology, experimental psychology (also known as scientific anthropology) or, finally, ethics, morals or characterology. Well then, the first of these revolves around this pivot: the problem of the perpetuity or posthumous permanence of the Ego; but deep down, the other two psychologies, whether they want to or not, bump into the same problem. You could well ask me, how does experimental psychology arrive to the metaphysic problem of immortality? I’ll tell you: when it hits upon the entirely paradoxical and mysterious nature of conscience; look it up in Aristotle, for instance, or, closer to us, in modern spiritists. “Spiritism is a science!” (Basil Scientific School).

So, as you can see, this question of the soul—if it dies or if it doesn’t—turns men against each other to the point of war. It’s a fact. Here I would like to talk about Psychology invoking facts, not only syllogisms.

If a Third World War were to start (and it would be the last one) it would be between an officially atheist nation and other officially religious ones—even when, in fact, you’ll find religious people in Russia and, on the other hand, that religion in the Western World is frequently nothing more than a nominal and cosmetic affair. But anyway, in the end, the question debated with motorized troops and ethereal bombs will definitely be over whether paradise must be established in this sublunary world without considering another life (the soul dies with the body), or if we must count on another life (the soul doesn’t die) to fulfill the same end. So we actually face two heresies that fight each other without taking into account the Christian truth that establishing paradise on this planet is quite impossible—it can only happen in another life (even if a feeble reflection of paradise on earth could be attained if only everyone decided to abide by the Sermon of the Mount).

So you can well say: prove us the immortality of the soul, and we’ll be perfectly happy and next Tuesday you’ll have us here again ready to pay the entrance fee. “Show us the Father and that will be enough for us!”—they told Him at the Last Supper; and He said: “Philip, why do you ask me to show you the Father? Philip, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” Some disappointment! And that’s how I feel too, compelled as I am to say: “Gentlemen, look into your own souls and you’ll find the immortality of the soul”.

The “La Vanguardia” newspaper,[[20]](#footnote-20) prohibited my article proving immortality; it’s a good thing that it doesn’t exist anymore. When in 1936 I obtained my tenure for the *“Aníbal Ponce”* chair, “La Vanguardia” indignantly objected that a priest had been designated Chair Professor of Psychology, contending that he should not be teaching Psychology at all, instead of trying to prove the immortality of the soul, which he probably is now doing, the horror! Well, the sad news is that unfortunately in 15 years I have never done such a thing. Because I feared “La Vanguardia”? No—because it’s very difficult: a thing like that is easier said than done, it isn’t done in five minutes but only after a long and exacting course; and even then, some students cannot unequivocally appreciate the demonstration. Here it would be suitable to bring up the name of Duns Scotus, “the subtle doctor”, the shrewd Franciscan, who never shared Saint Thomas’ demonstration: he maintained that the perpetuity of the Ego can never be proved by reasoning, only by faith. For his part, Saint Thomas said that it could be proved by reason alone: but, needless to say, his arguments are not up everyone's alley.

Max Scheler´s point of view

Last year I told you about that great psychologist, Max Scheler, and his peculiar position on this point: on the one hand he appears to be a Scottist, but on the other, a Thomist also—and all that in a very confused way. He says that none of the rational proofs of immortality quite clinch it, nor those in Plato’s Fedon, nor those found in the Summa, nor Kant’s, nor Brentano’s; but then, that there’s no need to prove it either, *feeling* it is enough. That said, feeling it is no easy matter, one has to make a painful effort wrestling with oneself (Bergson). In five minutes’ time, I can tell you about the proofs that Scheler rejects; but only stated just like that is quite useless, they’re innocuous arguments, just like the classic definitions of the soul with which we started off. See, for example: in ancient times people used to say that you couldn’t split up a simple thing, like gold, for instance; and that an immaterial thing, deprived of quantity, is something supremely simple, therefore it’s death is inconceivable. After that, they demonstrated that the soul is simple, something we come to recognize by its acts, especially by its acts of intelligence and will. When I understand something, my judgement is not a composed thing, made up of three different logs (subject, conjunction and predicate), but more like a sudden and extremely simple flash of lightning in which those three logs are melt into one single whole. Think about it, not only does it lack extension (as bodies have), but it even escapes from time, it frees itself from that other bodily jail: two and two is four for all eternity… But, couldn’t another explanation be possible? Nope.

In his unconcluded work that was no more than a sketch, one could think that Scheler contradicted himself, given that on the one hand he says that immortality cannot be proved, and on the other hand, that such a thing isn’t even necessary, since you can feel it, apart from the fact that the so-called demonstrations aren’t valid… I believe in immortality… I believe based on this and that… and yet, this, that and the other thing do not properly prove it. Does that mean that yours is only an opinion? No, I know it for sure, but my certainty is not based on scientific evidence… Is it a question of faith then, based on Christian Revelation? No, it’s not based on Christian Revelation, but, as I said, on this, that and the other. It isn’t a question of faith, it’s a belief, but certainly a true one. This is all gibberish that cannot be resolved as Zubiri pretends by saying that this is one of Scheler’s posthumous works, and an unfinished one at that.

I think Scheler rejects the traditional demonstration in its defective formulation, as it happened to be expressed during the XVIIth century; and that he wants to come up with a new demonstration that he cannot quite pull off; a new proof that would never be more than a renewal of the platonic arguments informed by Max Scheler’s philosophy of the personality. When all is said and done, all that Max Scheler seems to prove is that some aspect of religious nature becomes part of the proof of the permanency of the soul, and that that very present religious aspect is always a natural given to man, that can only be suppressed through vicious repression.

Be it as it may, now and here that proof cannot be admitted: it’s one of those difficult things that you come across with in Philosophy, a thing that in itself is none to easy.

But with these modest talks, what I intend to do is prop up several posts that could support the different demonstrations, ultimately bringing them together in my final lecture on the Will. So let the first post or milestone remain with this very simple idea that we have pursued by examining three particularly clear souls: the idea that the reality of the soul, not perceived as people do in ordinary parlance (more like a word than anything else), but understood as something admirable and paradoxical—surprising and with a pervading existence—is something hugely different from the reality of the physical world, at the center of which it has been firmly fixed, now as a slave, now as a master.

Chesterton vindicated

Oh dear Gilbert Keith Chesterton, you who were no mean psychologist in your own right, such as your admirable and abundant work eloquently proves! The object of Psychology is the reality of things seen through the reality of man’s spirit which happens to be the most real of all things, except God Himself, whom we could not know either, were it not through our own spirit. How could you ever deny that, you, oh Gilbert, the most spiritual of English fat men, if ever there was one?

“Psychology consists in looking into your own soul as opposed to observing the reality of things…”. True, admittedly you were surrounded by pseudo would-be psychologists, phenomenalists, positivists, psycho-physicians and the whole lot of fraudulent scientists who substituted the crude and saintly reality of the truth of life with self-satisfied and fickle literary devices, dilettante scientism and incestuous narcissism. It was against them that you launched your tirade of imprecation and ridicule; but how much true psychology does not flow from the 130 volumes of your complete works? How many acute reflections do we not find there on the reality of things that belong to the gigantic human spirit…

Here's the greatest paradox of all, a soul: simultaneously one and double, simple and multiple, flowing and permanent, rotten and yet noble in extreme, weak and strong at the same time, always withering and yet immortal!

\*

In 1951 Castellani translated into Spanish Chesterton’s *The Queen of Seven Swords* (using “Clara Petty de Saravia” as his *nom de plume*) and preceding it with this short piece on the difficulties of doing good translations. (The book was published as *La reina de las siete espadas*, Buenos Aires, 1951, Plantín, and this Prologue is found on pages 7-11).

On translations

You can’t translate without some flaws here or there; but try to render a poet’s poem and you’ll find your efforts ludicrous.

Cervantes said that translations are exercises in inverted tapestry; he could be right on prose; but if you’re dealing with poetry your brocade will be entirely different: never the same, always for the worse; in sackcloth.

There’s only one exception, where the tapestry might be as good as the original, and that’s when the poem is foreign to you, and one read years ago; it’s the case when on a morning your translator suddenly wakes up and on the spur of the moment translates it *currente calamo* not even remembering every line; and that can only happen if the translator is in fact a better poet than the one he’s translating; but then, it’s difficult to conceive a man with that class of talent doing translations.

Because if he is a minor or an equal poet, the rendering will always be inferior for the obvious reason that the translated poet had a free hand when he was at his work whereas the translator, as if in a sack race, has his own ideas and feelings tied up in someone’s else bag; and for any poet the things referred to are wound up to certain words in such a way that transplanted to other ones, just wither away; keep in mind that there is no such thing as an exact correspondence between two languages, and that only “transpositions” are possible.

That’s why it has been cleverly said that in literature, stealing is lawful provided it is followed by murder.

Such has been the case in the history of poetry three or four times; if I say seven, I think I’d be counting one to many. Horace’s *Odes* rendered by Luis de León, Virgil’s *Pastoral Poems* by Garcilaso de la Vega...

I don’t remember a third example, but I’m quite sure it’s not Mitre’s translation of Shakespeare, as a friend over here suggests. Maybe one could include Goethe’s version of Marlowe.

One example I do remember is Leopardi’s translation of the brief and precious poem and epitaph that belongs to an unknown Spanish poet, remarkable for its sober brevity.

*Lungi dal proprio ramo*

*Povera foglia frale*

*Dove vai? Dal faggio*

*Là ov’io naqui, mi divise el vento.*

*Esso, tornando a volo*

*Dal bosco alla campagna*

*Dalla valle mi porta alla montagna...*

*Seco instancabilmente*

*Vo pellegrina e tuto l’altro ignoro.*

*Vo dove va ogni cosa*

*Dove naturalmente*

*Va la foglia di rosa*

*E la foglia d’alloro...*

This original inspired dirge has been translated into Italian without a word too many (in fact, one can count three words in excess, but that’s neither here nor there). The original goes like this:

*Pobre hoja seca, ¿dónde vas en vuelo*

*De mariposa enferma y desvaída,*

*Entre la niebla y luz descolorida*

*Del sol de otoño y desteñido cielo?*

*¿Dónde vas, hoja seca, no nacida*

*Ni para el alto azul ni el bajo suelo,*

*Ni para demasiada dicha y duelo,*

*Hoja que va como se va mi vida?*

*Yo no sé. De la flor vuelo a la fosa,*

*Del suelo al astro, al lodo o al vergel,*

*Presa de un aspirar que no reposa,*

*Donde va toda cosa*

*En confuso tropel...*

*Voy donde va la hoja de la rosa,*

*Voy donde va la hoja del laurel...*

Perhaps one should note in two pieces with identical content where lie the differences between Italian and Spanish tastes; the latter stresses color and ornament, the former is limpid.

We believe the Italian rendering is superior to the original sonnet, unless they both plagiarized an anonymous French poet—not an uncommon practice during the 19th century.

Having said that, there was no need to damage Mr. Gilbert’s great poem translating him into Spanish in verse, especially if the translation would be published with the original face to face, as is here the case.

In front of me I have two volumes of translations from English and American poets into Spanish... They all seem rather like one another... In spite of the fact that they are as different as a village of angels, the Spanish translations sound monotonously uniform (one seems to be repeatedly listening to the tones of the Spanish Academy before the times of Rubén Darío.) And that, even when the translators are excellent poets such as Querol, de Vedia, José María Heredia (not the French one), Caro, Unamuno, Isaacs, Samaniego, Díez Canedo, Pombo and Llorente: this last one, the almost perfectly succesful translator of Faust and Sully-Prudhomme.

In Llorente’s version, Byron’s ferocious pirate sounds like a medieval troubador: the Viking morphed into something of a southern Spaniard. Ideas get diffused, unduly sweetened and, as it were, “caulked”.

Here, however, is a poet that seems to be up to the job: Mr. Félix M. de Samaniego who’s several fables where presented to the public as his own when in fact they belong to the English poet, John Gay (1688-1752). The innocent thief was discovered by Marquis Melgar; we say innocent because the perfect Spanish makes him worthy of the indult we have mentioned before.

The great Argentine translator in verse, Mr. Carlos Obligado, once told us that you can translate from English into Spanish respecting the metrics because Spanish synalephas work in a way that it is quite possible to squash several words into the hendecasyllabic verse. We didn’t agree. We’re sorry for our much loved and missed friend, it just isn’t possible. English is the most brief, the most barbarian and the most beautiful language in the world. On the other hand, Spanish, at least the way we use it, is swollen and obese.

So after trying in vain to render,

*But I have learned what wiser knights*

*Follow the Grail and not the Gleam*

and suchlike verses, the translator here sagely chose to put it into prose—at least that would be of some use to the Spanish reader, avoiding the jarring notes; grinding sounds are something we can do without, especially in a book dedicated to Our Blessed Lady, our *Queen of the Seven Swords*.

As it is, in Argentina we’ve had enough of that.

\*

In this short and original essay, Castellani gives us a portrait of the Counter Reformation that will set any serious Catholic thinking. Not to mention his unexpected resource to Kierkegaard. Here’s another piece of our priest that shows him thinking out of the box—and with what results. The article was originally published in the magazine *Dinámica Social* (Buenos Aires, nº 56, april 1955) and later appeared as an appendix to one of his books (*Cristo ¿vuelve o no vuelve?*, Buenos Aires, Dictio, 1976, pp. 291-300).

A little step forward

*If subdued by the Protestant cause, much as he may be convinced that he’s moving forward, that Christian is in fact taking a step backwards.*

Among us Argentines some people think differently; including a couple of friends of mine that dabble in politics. They think that bringing in Divorce, adopting the separation of Church and State, priests getting married, giving freemasons a free hand, importing the Ku-Klux-Klan and the *Prohibition Act* [[21]](#footnote-21), plus implementing a widespread distribution of Bibles and cutting off some good negro heads—well, then Argentina would arise to lead all civilizations, just like the U.S. They’re mad.

*“But doesn’t the U.S. benefit from educational freedom?”*

*“Yup.”*

*“Well then, there you are, Protestantism is the true modern Religion since it promotes in all nations simple human honesty. All the* “sanctity, sanctity” *crap, all that baloney about the Holy Mother Church… and after that all you get is Catholic countries stuck, trapped by everything, without not so much as a trace of simple human honesty… How come that true religion originated such things? By their fruits you shall know them...”.*

Another day we’ll deal with the problem of Catholic countries’ backwardness, a subject that some Catholic writers have dipped their pen and noses into, such as Balmes, Donoso Cortés, Ramón y Cajal, Count de Maistre, Monseigneur Bougaud, Hilaire Belloc and others; and yet the question remains open. This time we’ll only address the following simple proposition: *Protestantism constitutes a step backwards…* Protestantism wanted to return to the Primitive Church; but it overreached itself and ended up in heathenism; in this “neo-paganism” to which Pope Saint Pius X referred to.

I shall turn to a Protestant doctrine that belongs to the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, who in this country has been stigmatized as a “Lutheran” by Professor Aranguren in the *Buenos Aires University Revue*, as well as by Doctor Sciacca and Fr. Jolivet in public lectures; and even Fr. Quiles S.J. in one or two pamphlets of his…

Enough and to spare.

I’m not sure if he was a Lutheran. I do know he was born one, that he was a cradle Lutheran, that he desired to be a Lutheran *Pfarrer*, except that they didn’t let him. That he never converted to the Roman Catholic Church—something unconceivable in any case—even when the Danish state accepted Roman Catholics in their 1849 Constitution, a short time before he died. But what I do know for sure is that he converted to God in one great outbreak of light, that was seen by many on this planet. And that continued and will continue to be seen… but not by everybody, of course.

Leaving aside his words and his one-of-a-kind, dense, complicated style, here I pretend to expound his thoughts briefly resorting to his books written during his last three years: his *Tage-bucher*, *Einuebung in Christentum* and *Der Augenblick*. [[22]](#footnote-22)

These days Catholicism and Protestantism suppose each other; they are like a buttressed wall; propped one another up in such a way that they depend on each other and nowadays cannot stand alone.

When referred to Protestantism this is undeniable, given that initially it was established as a certain protest against a certain Something—something that was really wrong in those days—but that has been incorporated to the “Reform” as a presupposed fact and a reference point in itself, even when in a subordinated manner. If we were to remove Medieval Christianity from the Protestant *Weltanshauung* the result would be something like a landscape without perspective or a two-dimensional world.

Luther rebelled against a vicious thing; Luther’s message and his insistence on “inwardness” (or “interiority”) was well founded. The Medieval Church had drifted into what eventually became an unbearable tyranny: the tyranny of externality, the formal and the violent was threatening to transform Europe’s religious life into something quite different from Christ’s spirit; let us remember the executions of Joan of Arc, of John Hüss, Wyclef, Savonarola…

Religion had veered towards politics and got mixed up with imperialism; the means she resorted to were more and more harsh; her practices were more and more complicated and exterior; her spirit less and less fraternal, her life more and more automatic. Essentially there was a crisis of the interiority (of the “Faith”) along with a hypertrophy of the human (of the “Works”) that had destroyed the balance of those two necessary elements: and that’s how it forged and embraced a new type of pharisaism. We could perhaps put it this way: Saint Genaro’s and Savonarola’s blood finished covering up Christ’s.

Luther escaped from that soaked and pressed clay, running away from his cloister; a monkish man (he says as much himself) who had lived obeying the strict and oppressive old monastic “rules”; someone who had not missed fasts, hair shirts, night vigils, indulgences, novenas and all manner of devotions—everything except inner prayer—without quite “saving” himself, without attaining inward peace. Luther emerged from that environment crying out with undeniable truth: “We’re not saved by the Works of the Law but by Jesus Christ’s grace”; after which he began to argue against “works” (against his past, as it were); but the controversy became so fervid, fueled as it was by his own irascible passions, that he gradually found himself in a position he hadn’t anticipated, twisting his German message into something quite different from his original tenets. If we now cull Lutheranism, we will be quite surprised to find its Results: they’re diametrically opposed to Luther’s initial preaching; for instance, a certain indulgent and relaxed Worldliness rather than the usual Fear and Trembling of the Saxon reformer’s teachings—or a new Paganism replacing Primitive Christianism (see, for example *Luthers Reformaiorische Schriften*, Deutsche Bibliothek, Berlin, 1913).

*“An interesting exercise would be to learn by heart one of Luther’s sermons and deliver it from a Copenhague pulpit…”*

says Kierkegaard in one of his “Diaries” from 1849:

*“It would be fascinating to witness the uproar that vicars, clerics and Counsellors of the State would unleash against such a preacher; and only then reveal the fact that the sermon actually belonged to Luther himself. Of course, one should first state before a notary what one intended to do; otherwise I would be accused of plagiarism; and, once discovered, of trying to be funny”.*

Luther’s first proclamation *“we must reach our inwardness, our interior soul!”* would have had scarce echo hadn’t it been accompanied with a much more popular one: *“Oh, you, Pope of Rome, dumb ass, old bag, silly clown, now you’ll see whom Doctor Martin is!”*, to which a great multitude of disgruntled people (some of them with good reason) immediately answered *“Hurrah!”* to that, and among the motley crowd a new and more popular cheer gradually prevailed: *“Wine, women and song!”, to which the big gathering answered back Hurrah, hurrah, Her Dóktor Déutsche Mártin Lúther!”*.

Luther’s insurrection asserted itself with the intention of liberating people from a tyranny; and against that background, Luther’s words were effectively liberating; but if you suppress the tyranny nothing remains but incoherent baloney—a theology that dissolves in one contradiction after another: without the presupposition, the contention loses sense, like an answer to a nonexistent question.

Generation after generation, Europe had been educated in the *Memento Mori*, the constant remembrance of Death, Judgement, Hell: it had been oppressed by practices, duties and pious shibboleths; it had been terrorized with the stake for heretics and religious wars—and it had become used to conflate religion with external signs and stereotyped gestures turned into routines and fetishisms, such as, for example, ecclesiastical celibacy, originally a simple recommendation gradually turned into a “mandate” (sketchily observed, I grant you that); the buying of forgiveness of sins through indulgences; power and political doings, power and economic dealings substituting contemplation and the preaching of Truth… and so on.

Such an environment cried out for a reformer, an advocate demanding religious inwardness; but a Reformer is a man who lays men with burdens, not one who removes them; someone who tightens things up, not one who loosens them; one who ties up new lassos or binds broken ones, not one who loosens them up; and to that, in the end, must, somehow, finish as a martyr. Unfortunately, Luther was far from that. Instead, he became popular… I myself, am a religious writer; were I popular, then I wouldn’t be a religious writer.

Sadly, the polemical undertones of those times had a bad influence on Catholicism: see for example the exegetical nonsense Maldonado delivers out of his obsession with Calvinists. A considerable part of modern Catholicism has been built upon the Council of Trent’s formulae rather than upon the Gospel: in other words, it has been configured against Protestantism, something that suggests a subconscious *ersatz* of the very thing one’s fighting. If you’re fencing against someone, you can’t move freely: every movement of yours depends on your rival’s initiatives.

Protestantism run away with a certain amount of essences (or, we could say, with Christian core truths), that Catholicism was in much need of and that in fact abandoned and even fought against, deeming them “heresies”: like, for instance, reading and studying the Bible, so intensely practiced by the Church Fathers, now substituted by reading pious authors of more and more coarse and mediocre works; and, because I’ve lived in Protestant countries, resigned another list of excellent things I could easily itemize…

In an effort to reinforce ecclesiastical celibate (that I hold to be admirable and a saintly thing), the Counter-Reformation adopted harsh measures turning it into a kind of absolute; introducing the notion that a man is a priest because he’s not married, and suffice with that; as if it were a charisma of sorts, one that could even sometimes exempt from the duty of work; and that *per se* has a sanctifying power and enough clout to perfect human nature—something of a theological error!

The Counter-Reformation externalized the faith to a greater degree, changing its main object and replacing it by the Most Holy Mary (my Mother) and even the Pope (to whom I owe respect and obedience), recasting him as a more infallible person than he himself ever pretended; dissolving the pure faith in a transcendent God, now replaced by external pious exercises and “commandments of men”.

The Counter-Reformation exalted the soldierly virtue of “obedience”; and that, considered, as it were, in a more comfortable automatic manner, and not in its spirit, and then, turning it into a kind of theological virtue to the point that it can even substitute personal conscience.

The Counter-Reformation defended and propagated Suarez’s notion of “deeds above all, action sooner than contemplation”, that nowadays plagues the Church causing the ascendancy of the edgy mediocre over the vulnerable wise man; and even the persecution of the insightful and perceptive by inferior people (holding higher rank).

Finally, the Counter-Reformation augmented the sacramental aspect of our Faith at the expense of its preaching; it reduced the importance of contemplation and charity in Apologetics and beneficence matters (not bad things at all, in themselves, but never the most important); drove away lay people from the ecclesiastic centers of power (also known as “the Hierarchy”), converting the Church into the most totalitarian of societies; and unduly resorting to all kinds of “propaganda”.

Just to name one or two things. All of this, by the way, without much religious results. This is the Counter-Reformation’s negative face; I will not deny its immense positive face that others have pondered well enough.

But, when all is said and done, there’s a distinctive difference between Catholicism (supposing its twisted version), and Protestantism (supposing it’s twisted too). To my mind, there’s a certain refinement in the Reform’s downfall that proceeds from the fact that the Reform presupposes Catholicism, while Catholicism presupposes nothing. Protestantism was born as a corrective (and so, necessarily supposes something to be corrected) whereupon it acquired a prescriptive mien: that’s the reason why it amended nothing. The Reform wanted to become the Norm; but the Norm only sprouts from the Form.

Let’s take a simple example that perhaps is not entirely imaginary. Let’s suppose in the Catholic Church a mundane prelate entirely addicted to the world; not to the point of stumbling on the courts or punished by nature or public opinion—that wouldn’t be a major concern, but, on the contrary, quite an unworldly sanction, since the really mundane type is very prudent, and knows how to enjoy it all with prudence, enjoying even his own prudence, as the most perfect among the Epicureans did… as well as some Renaissance cardinals. The prelate who by virtue of his religious position avails himself with all manner of pleasures that his rank make possible will easily be judged and condemned as deficient by any sincere Catholic. Why so? Because a Catholic (for all his faults) always remembers the Other Figure, the pathetic figure of One who lived in Poverty and Humiliation. Be him an obscurantist, a routinized or relaxed Catholic, in his Religious Orders (or out of them) the reflection of the Sorrowful Christ follows him wherever he goes, be it through fasts, hair shirts, flagellations, solitude, rules, night vigils, penance—and so he can always compare the mundane bishop with that Model. [[23]](#footnote-23)

Now, let us imagine a Protestant region without a trace of Catholicism. Nowadays usually they coexist geographically, regions where an osmosis of sorts takes place, both religions taking or lending things to each another. But let’s suppose a place where only Luther’s results constitute the region’s religion; in other words, the critique without its presupposition; where, therefore, anything suggesting penance, external mortification, or *askesis*, not only is not preached, but when referred to is always subject to ridicule, treated as madness or a sickness of sorts, as the lowest, imperfect and foulest thing to be found among human beings. In this 100% Protestant region suppose we find a bishop with the same habits and circumstances as the Catholic one we’ve just depicted. Well, in that case, the bishop will not be judged as mundane, but as perfect and pious. His worldliness will be considered Christian! It makes quite a difference.

People will see him as belonging to the Royal Council, frequenting important people, dressing with pomp and living in elegant houses, traveling in flamboyant carriages, writing useless book luxuriously edited, flattering the King every time he preaches, his careful homiletics annoying no one, participating in every official ceremony, at all times hunting for distinctions, very skilled in money matters, always building churches, on the look-out for a good candidate for his eldest daughter and already preparing his succession to the archiepiscopal see; and Protestant people will believe that all that passes well enough for Christianity: something that would never happen in a Catholic country (though it sometimes happens in Argentina, a Christian country, but then, never quite serious at that).[[24]](#footnote-24)

*Was Archbishop Mynster a witness of Truth?* In the wake of this brief work 36 pages long, Kierkegaard passed away; publishing that little book literally killed him. No, Archbishop Mynster was no witness to Truth as his son-in-law, Doctor Martensen, tried to convince those present at his funeral address; because “a witness to Truth” means to be a Martyr or an Apostle—sacred words one shouldn’t fiddle with. Kierkegaard wrote his opuscule, left it on the table, meditated and prayed over it for the whole of eight months; and then he published it he raised significant hue and cry in all Copenhagen. He never stepped back; on the contrary, he took ten steps forward: the 10 *Augenblick* issues. After that, he kicked the bucket.

Undoubtedly the short hunchback from Tivoli Gardens was more of a witness to Truth than the Solemn Prelate from the Kaiserhof; except that the people of Copenhague thought otherwise. Just as he had guessed would happen: Protestants have lost their instinct in telling apart unworldly from mundane people.

Luther proclaimed the loftiest of spiritual principles: pure inwardness. This is so dangerous that it can easily lead to lowly places (because in the spiritual realm the highest and the lowest look very much alike) setting off a certain adulteration of Christianity, deceiving people to the point of celebrating the dissipations of the senses as if it were a form of worshiping God. And that explains how they end up praising worldliness as… Piety. Such a thing could never happen to Catholicism.

And pray, why not? Because Catholicism assumes what is common, the raw nature, the pre-Christian reality: it presupposes that all of us are rascals. And pray, why such a thingcould not *conceivably* happen to Protestantism? Because the Protestant counts on a special presupposition, and not a common one, at that: by default it relies on a very conscientious man (the man shaped by the Church in Europe), one truly concerned with religion, who lives in Fear and Trembling, in search of *Metánoia*, and in each generation one comes across a smattering of such people.

To cut a long story short, Lutheranism worked as a corrective; but a corrective transformed into the whole picture, becoming the very norm of everything. Now, by the time the second generation arrives, the corrective necessarily constitutes the *eo ipso* (like one heading for something that’s not there anymore), and one gets mislead. And with each new generation, you cannot but one stray more and more from the original path, to the point that the corrective, having become autonomous, develops into its very antithesis, the opposite of its first intention. One takes salycilites against rheumatism; but if the rheumatism disappears and you insist with salycilites, my friend, your stomach will suffer for it.

And that’s precisely the case here. The Lutheran Corrective against medieval externality, once autonomous and pretending to be *the whole Christianity*, finished assimilating the most refined mundane and pagan guise: in other words, more “externality”.

Sören Kiekegaard, XIXth century’s most religious man, left us his testament in which he basically says this. He died a spiritual Catholic; moreover, he appears to us as like a certain saint, feeling his way as best he could, to whom God tried as no one else on earth: a blind eagle of sorts.

Blind? Not so. That would be to defame him. Let’s say instead that he was an eagle with a broken wing. And an all broken man: they pierced his hands and his feet and told all his bones.

\* \* \*

1. "What is Truth? It is the man you have in front of you." The answer to Pilate's question is given with the very same letters: an anagram invented by Boethius and that delighted the Middle Ages. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. An Argentine writer that delved into gardening and do-it-yourself activities. [Translator’s note] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. An improvised musical dialogue, common among Argentina peasants (*gauchos*). [Translator’s note] [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Donoso Cortés, *Discourse on the Events in Rome*, January 14th 1849. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. However, I freely admit that this is a difficult, delicate and debatable question. St Gregory the Great, for instance, says that the Kingdom of God and the Church are *not always* interchangeable; even when sometimes they can be.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Inquisition is an intricate historic topic if ever there was one and can only be resolved with serious historic research devoid of the usual recourse to anachronisms: one must be able to travel to other ages and *live in them* with the imagination. Of course, the clumsy accusation to the effect that in those days “free thinking was persecuted *qua* free thinking” and that the Church used violence to “convert people to the Faith” is false, historically untrue and simply absurd. In every case the Inquisition was not a Church creation, but one belonging to the political powers of the day; and if the Church as a body collaborated with it, its main purpose was to alleviate its hardness or impede its excesses. As the name itself indicates, its purpose was to *investigate* if those accused by the civil powers were or not real *heretics,* and if such was the case, to persuade them with reasons, or as a last resource, to obtain from them a public recantation that would *reduce* them (or guide them back) to the social consortium to which they originally belonged. The clearest instance of this is illustrated in the Donatists' case, who where repressed by the Empire mainly by force: at first St Augustine disapproved, but later tolerated such state of affairs. In this Institution, as in any other, one can find abuses, some of them perpetrated by the ecclesiastic authorities. The first one to suffer from this was the Church herself, as one can see in Cauchon’s case, who, with no jurisdiction over Joan of Arc, collaborated with the English feudal politics, perhaps out of crass ignorance⎯an awful failing in a Bishop⎯and not out of cruelty or wickedness. Caiphas exists, and will always do so. In our opinion, the Galileo Galilei and Giordano Bruno cases hurt the Church; but the reaction to such injustices put an end to the Roman Inquisition itself. The Pope suffered more with the Galilei affair than the Tuscan himself; who, some say, didn’t have such a rough time after all, gaining instead European renown, his moral character reinforced by the process. *“I torti e le ingiustizie che l’invidia e la malignitá mi hanno machinato contro, non mi hanno travagliato ne mi travagliano”* he says in a letter written on the 7th February, 1634, to Elia Diodati. As to Giordano Bruno, quite apart from his philosophic talents, he was an anarchic and unsociable character. His theological errors⎯shared by others when the Church was at the height of its powers⎯would have never been enough to take him to the stake: his dissocial activities (*anarchist* we would say nowadays) were the main reason for him being executed. Even if *modern mentality* cannot perceive it, some ideas can be as dangerous as bombs, and being a philosopher in no way can excuse anyone for trying to destroy legitimate authorities. Be that as it may, the role of the ecclesiastic burocracy in both cases were not without failings: they were myopic and even cruel. Perforce if opened eyes when the reactions of Europe’s intellectuals made themselves felt, beginning a new age, for better or worse. *“Ce vilain tribunal de l’Inquisition sous lequel presque toute la chretienté gémit”*, wrote Pascal in 1656. Just as their elder brothers and sisters, Joan of Arc and Boethius and so many others, these *rude martyrs,* do not prove much, except that political doings are a real and necessary thing, that the Church stands on them⎯in the process sometimes getting muddy feet⎯and that this is a serious and risky business which should not be taken lightly.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This paragraph should be read carefully: it doesn’t mean that the Church will lose the faith, as the Synagogue didn’t lose it either when the First Coming. “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do...” The Great Apostasy predicted by Christ and Saint Paul must be understood without exaggerations, in an orthodox way. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. To the question, man or spirit? we can answer in the following way: Antichrist shall be *both* things. Cornelio Alapide, for example seems to concur with that opinion (see his commentary to II Thessal., II:3) and even believes it to be a certain thing. So do we: that Antichrist shall also be a social body, a collective entity, an objective spirit, stands to reason, as anyone can infer from what we’ve been saying. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In English, in the original. [Translator’s note] [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. What we say here about Lacunza does not represent a justification nor a defence of this theologian skilled in Holy Scriptures, but a critical reference to his work, that I draw from Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo. In his monumental *History of Spanish Heterodoxy*, Volume VI, appendix to chapter 4, the great Spanish critic puts forward his opinion to the effect that this edition in London was provided by José Joaquín de Mora, “a well known fact” says he. It isn’t possible: for our copy includes an anonymous letter “from the Publisher to all Americans” where he ponders “his loss, not being able to verify the book’s circulation in his loved Buenos Aires”. This assertion gives better credentials to “the other ‘well known fact’, namely that the edition was provided by the Belgrano brothers, Manuel and Mario the ambassador. The book comes in four splendid volumes with beautiful typography inscribed in rich paper, though with many misprints, printed by Charles Wood, Poppin’s alley, Fleet Street, 1816”. It is not the first edition. The editor assures that the book “has been translated already into all the cultured languages of Europe”, and circulates in manuscript form through the United Provinces of the River Plate, being promoted⎯even if in a abreviated edition⎯by the Oriental Army’s first General Vicar, Bartomolé Muñoz. The editor’s motives are not only scientific, his intentions seem to be more patriotic than anything else⎯to show the continental Spanish that “if South Americans are animals, he would like to know in what species do they include them for classification”, as a deputy to the Courts of Cadiz had recently inquired. These motives are of great value to us nowadays, apart from our natural scientific interest, which is great. It doesn’t seem reasonable, either, that this book should still figure among the forbidden books listed by the Index. Critical studies, including Menéndez y Pelayo, show that the listing of this book has nothing to do with the author’s orthodoxy and science⎯instead, that it obeys to circumstantial reasons that caused quite an uproar in those days; for example, his “lack of reverence and harsh insinuations concerning Pope Clement XIV, who’s Brief decreed the Society’s extinction”. Nowadays such reservations would make no sense to readers who wouldn’t even detect the puns unless previously warned. The rest of the objections lean on his fired and reckless language⎯and aims not at the substance of his doctrine. Such censures could be summarized as a general objection to what they called “shades of Jewishry”, because Lacunza wrote under the guise of a Jewish Rabbi⎯we know not why⎯signing as Josaphat Ben-Ezra; himself being from Spanish ascendancy, though perhaps a “new Christian” by a Jewish mother. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Having written this, I have stumbled upon another work of this type, more closely fitted to the Book of Revelation than Benson’s. It is “Three Dialogues” by the Russian mystic, Wladimir Solovieff, written little before his death in 1900; and a more *prophetic* novel—even if less artistic—than the later work by the English bishop. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Pre-phasic realizations*. See this topic admirably explained by Bainvel in his article “*La Parousie*” in the “Nouvelle Revue Apologétique” magazine, Paris, 1928; and in Louis Billot’s book on the same subject, from where Bainvel draws freely. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. One must bear in mind that Castellani wrote this *circa* 1947. [Translator’s note]. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Those who cannot quite follow my meaning—and this is no place to abound any more—can consult Kenneth Fearing’s novel *The Big Clock* to which I’ve referred before. His is an original style, similar to the one we’ve been explaining: a winding progression. Ibsen’s technique in his play John Gabriel Borkmann is not dissimilar. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. One should be cautious when applying the Vials to our times and only as a strictly personal interpretation—even when this one certainly coincides with other contemporary interpreters such as Holzhauser, Eyzaguirre, Paul Claudel and André Suarès. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Keep in mind that Castellani was delivering his lecture nearly twenty years before Vatican II. But perhaps, our kind readers will not feel totally inappropriate to remember Evelyn Waugh’s lines, written in 1964, two years before his death: *“When I wrote* Brideshead Revisited *I was consciously writing an obituary of the doomed English upper class. It never occurred to me, writing* Sword of Honour*, that the Church was susceptible to change. I was wrong and I have seen a superficial revolution in what then seemed permanent”*. [Translator’s note]. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Castellani was talking 65 years ago (we’re now in 2020). And as I happen to have a daughter who lives in the Province of Salta (up north of Argentina, far away from Buenos Aires) I rang her up to ask if society over there, traditional as it famously is, kept these marriage customs. To my great surprise she said that Castellani was spot on, that among the upper classes over there, divorce is very rare (adultery is another matter: hypocrisy, she said, was the real name of the game. But, well, I don’t know, my daughter doesn’t like the “*salteños*”, not one bit). On the other hand, I also talked with my daughter in law, whose mother is from Salta (she’s a “Cornejo”, something of a household name over there) and after beating around the bush, she finally admitted that in recent years there have been, for the first time, a few divorces in the upper classes. So, perhaps we could say that the destruction of tradition has finally reached Salta as well… [Translator’s note]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Getulio Vargas, was Brasil’s president. He killed himself a few days before Castellani’s conference, on August 4th, 1954. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. As I have indicated in my brief introduction, in his conference Castellani got one or two facts wrong, saying that Helen Keller graduated in 1920 from New York University, and, worse, that she had obtained PhDs in Latin, Greek, English, French and German. As the reader can see, I have taken the liberty to replace these extravagant claims with the more modest (and realistic) truth, which, in any case, can be easily verified by way of any Internet search engine. [Translator’s note]. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. A Buenos Aires’ Socialist newspaper, now disappeared and good riddance to bad rubbish. [Translator’s note]. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Castellani puts this in English. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Castellani read Kierkegaard mostly in German translations (though he also read some Italian, French translations and even dabbled into Danish to get a better sense of the author’s meaning); in his time Spanish renderings of the Dane were very bad; something that has been remedied over the years [Translator’s note]. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The reader must always remember that this was written years before Vatican II and the subsequent debacle. [Translator’s note]. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. One must remember this was written more than half a century ago. Nowadays, ¿seriously Catholic? If you have any doubts, take the current Pope as an example… [Translator’s note]. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)