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Charles Malato
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1893

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Religions

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“Fear gave birth to the first gods,” a Latin poet said.

Yes, Very Holy Father, representative of that tramp Jesus, humbly give your holy slipper to kiss, if some sad idiots prostrate themselves before your sacred toes — it is because one fine day the polished monkey who was our ancestor was too scared of thunder — from this fear was born the idea of religion.

Only the most uneducated minds can still imagine that religions were created all at once. Spontaneous generation (as in the physical world so in the moral) is much rarer than you might believe. For such a birth to take place, all the constitutive elements have to have already developed, met and combined. The superficial observer, by himself, might believe that it happened all at once; in reality, a religion is not, any more than a man, made in five minutes.

How our primitive ancestors must have trembled! Everything was mysterious and hostile to them: lightning, hurricanes, snow, storms, epidemics and monsters magnified by the imagination, leaving their dens to battle with men! All these forces, inherent in eternal matter, all these formidable beings seemed to them to be greater than them — poor, naked, ignorant animals. Everything became a god whom they sought to sway, to whom they attributed

passions, with whom they tried to talk. And to succeed in such an enterprise, wasn't the best thing to offer gifts? The first believers naturally offered to the gods what they themselves loved: fruits, flowers, the products of the hunt or the harvest — that's the origin of worship, an immense field open to the exploitation of the gullible by conmen. And then there arose imaginative people, the poets, the false savants who claimed to know more than the others, the swindlers who wanted to capitalize on the situation, and everyone adding legend upon legend and codifying the superstition. Thus, side by side with the monarchs and the warlords, they created an infinitely more frightening authority, for it was based in the heavens, i.e. in the unknown — the almighty mystery.

There went humanity down the road of marvels. Where will it end? While those lagging farthest behind linger in fetishism, in the worship of raw matter, others stole their cosmogonies. The Persians set up a whole system based on the dualism appearing in nature: Ohrmazd-light and Ahriman-darkness are in constant struggle.

Egypt deified its Nile and, in sketching out an astronomical science, took its basic mythology from it. Everywhere else, too, the climate, the place and the race had an affect upon the development and the form of the religious idea.

Man was not created in the image of God: he himself created his gods.

The Greeks, a nation of artists, sitting on the coast of the Mediterranean, deified their shores, their mountains, their laurel forests, their chanting springs — they raised a temple to lovely nature. On the contrary, the Semites, wandering in the gloomy deserts, living under a constantly blazing sky, made a menacing Jehovah, always ready to punish; and it was only after the Macedonian conquest, when the Greeks of Alexander brought a few scraps of Platonic ideology into Judah, that these two such opposite beliefs began to fuse together. From this fusion was born the Christian religion.

The social revolts of Judas the Gaulonite, of Mathias and later of Joseph Gorionides were stifled in Palestine by the Roman generals,

but something survived: an idea of reform blowing through the old world. A renewal, not just symbolic but real, was able to come out of it. The first Christians, revolutionary innovators, had proclaimed human equality. Consequently, the disciples who claimed to follow them should have preached (then and still) the holy insurrection against the powerful. A few of them did, but after the destruction of Jerusalem, their successors trembled before the power of the Caesars, mumbling their opportunist words, “My kingdom is not of this world.” They submitted and protested their submission. However, they had to do something to feed the zeal of the faithful, if they did not want to be dragged by them into some perilous movement, like of the Bagaudae in the third century. The bishops gave up all social demands, threw themselves whole-heartedly into theology, intoxicating the naïve flocks with their casuistry. At the same time they conspired among the emperors, crept into their palaces, into the Senate, into public offices. These descendants of communist-anarchists became clever and power-hungry when Constantine, knowing all the help they could give him, summoned them to him. It was their ascension: all of a sudden these reformers turned into unyielding guards of the old order — the usual about-face for all the upstarts, men and parties.

Such is, in a few lines, the historical summary of the Christian movement from its apparent origin to its moment of triumph. Jesus (taking into account his existence stripped of miracles) was less an originator or chief than a poet; a popular poet writing in prose and parables; a poet who was remembered because he appealed to the emotions more than to the intellect and he had the crowd and women on his side.

Paul, who came after him, had a completely different role to play as founder and organizer of the Church. At his urging the first communities of the faithful were formed, drawing up their statutes, electing their ministers, striving to influence the profane world and enter into it. How did this organization, which was democratic at first, turn into the most tyrannical of autocracies? It was the work

of centuries and also of circumstances, just as much as the stubborn ambition of the Latin bishops, who were closer than the others to the spectacle of imperial power and by this very fact were more quickly corrupted.

Constantine summoned the heads of the Church; they flaunted their victory at the Council of Nicaea where they established the grounds of the faith that the world would have to suffer. We know the results: the emperors abandoned more and more of the West to the power of the barbarians; the Roman bishops ended up taking their place and becoming temporal as well as spiritual masters.

This lasted eleven centuries. For eleven centuries people were forced to believe even in the absurd, especially in the absurd, *credo quia absurdum*; for eleven centuries men were burned, drowned, hanged and tortured for the crime of thinking or simply of doubting. And when the popular sentiment threatened to rebel, fast, we need a diversion: Go after the Jews! They're the ones who spread disease! Go after the Muslims! God wants it! Those miscreants are living among you, as they want, without asking permission from the Pope!

And the disinherited rush out to reforge their chains.

Against this papal Christianity is a popular Christianity, which gave rise to the revolts of Judas the Gaulonite and the Bagaudae ended up bursting forth. The Albigensian anarchists — for, the anarchist inclination, if not the conception, is as old as the world — massacred in the 13th century, found their avengers in the Germanic countries. While the princes and the bourgeois followed Luther in his revolt against Rome, demanding a few liberties, the disinherited, who called for all liberties because they had none, (with Stork and Munzer) waged a war to the death against the convents and castles. Crushed in Frankhausen, they were reborn in Munster and even though they were conquered again, they scattered the seeds of republican and communist ideas into the winds of the future.

These enragés played the same role as the Hébertists who 260 years later shook up the reluctant Conventionnels. Without them

the Reform could not have worked — it had capitulated right away to Rome. But they stopped it and that is what brought upon them the hatred of Luther and Melanchton, who were scared of what they had done and were still thinking of negotiating with the enemy. They finally saw (and this to their great honor) that it was not simply a religious overhaul but a complete social and human renovation.

Since the 16th century the truncated Church has lost its power, in spite of the invisible protection that the Jesuits provide to it. It is tough, however, and gives up ground only inch by inch, often carrying out terrible offensive counter attacks. The revolution chases it away and it returns; the Empire tames it and it snaps at the heels; the socialist state threatens to devour it and it tries to sidetrack it because it cannot fight head to head.

That's where we are right now: a tremendous trap is laid out for the modern mind. The champions of the Papacy, dressed up like Christian Socialists and Anti-Semites know that the huge mass of people, disgusted by the old credos, has still not digested all positive philosophy. They know that the human mind, in search of wonders, is easy to lead astray and centuries of atavism lie heavily upon us. Having decided to take advantage of every opportunity to give life back to the idea of religion, they are lying in wait for us in the students of Loyola. It's up to us to understand their plans and to fight relentlessly against a disguised enemy for the intellectual and material emancipation of humanity!