

DISINTEGRATION OF RELIGION.*

BY PÈRE HYACINTHE LOYSON.

IN that part of Europe which is the seat of what we call Occidental civilization, we are witnesses to a fact far more terrible than the sight of conflagrations and massacres which are offered us in the East by the other half of the so-called Christian world. Is not moral anarchy worse than material anarchy? and, as the Moslems say, is it not the greatest of sins to kill a soul which has known God?

The foundations of intellectual, moral, and social life are shaken, we could almost say overthrown, in the popular mind,—and this almost universal work of destruction is called by those who are bringing it about, “the emancipation of democracy” and “progress of mankind.”

Those pretended “leaders of mind” claim to act in the name of free-thought, to which we lay claim quite as much as they. But there are two kinds of free-thought: that which denies without affirming anything, and consequently, without being constructive; and that which affirms after having denied, which builds up again after having destroyed. The negative free-thinkers have, in a somewhat arrogant and even brutal manner, excommunicated the constructive free-thinkers, especially those who intend to remain religious.

The former regard all religions as dangerous fallacies, be it that of the purest Gospel, or even that of reason though interpreted by Descartes or Leibnitz. They are determined, they say, to abide by morality, and lo! now they attack morality itself—that morality, at least, which commands and will be obeyed, and which may be summed up in Kant’s magnificent expression, “the categorical imperative.” It is that same morality, irreversible because absolute,

* Translated from the French by Amélie Sérafon.

which inspired us in the heroic days of the Dreyfus affair. May our dearest interests perish if justice will but triumph!

Nowadays, essentially relative rules for conduct are recommended to us. They are a kind of compromise between individual and general interest; their origin and nature are empirical; they are ever changeable and controvertible like the fluctuating society in which they originate and over which they rule. With such a program, they pretend to solve the deep and terrible problems which have been racking the human mind for centuries, and to replace the institutions of the past by two new creations: school and State without God; the most foolhardy say "school and State hostile to God."

In opposition to such an enterprise we find the Catholic Church putting in its protest, and with good reason, but without the slightest chance of success. Stricken with a malady dating as far back as its origin in the time of Constantine, this Church, so great a power, has received from Pius IX the mortal stroke which has thrown it into the death struggle and which will sooner or later reduce it to a corpse,—but a galvanized corpse. Ah, Pius IX! they hasten to make him a saint, since they can not make him a god!

I have conversed several times with Pius IX alone, and can only congratulate myself upon his kindness toward me. He was an amiable, witty man, but lacking in solid instruction. In the beginning of his pontificate he was a great admirer of the works of Rosmini and of Gioberti, those great lights of the Church, but he finally condemned them both. If he was a saint, he was certainly a conceited saint, such as we sometimes see; and one could get from him whatever one wished by taking advantage of his vanity of which he was unconscious, as well as by appealing to his warm and affectionate heart. It was after one of these very tender interviews (when he was pleased to make very flattering puns with my name) that I understood the occasion of the prophecy current at Rome concerning him: *destructor cali et terræ* (Destroyer of Heaven and Earth), according to which he was to destroy the two powers entrusted to him, the spiritual and the temporal, by confounding the two in one and outraging both.

Leo XIII and Pius X continued, each in his way, the work of their predecessor. They could not do otherwise. Pius IX, by the solemn promulgation of the Syllabus and the dogma of Infallibility, placed the Papacy outside of the spirit of the Gospel in direct contradiction with the best established historical facts, with the most positive laws of the present, and the surest solution of the future.

Leo XIII permitted the Catholics to place themselves in open antagonism with justice in the Dreyfus affair; Pius X, in the condemnation of Loisy's exegetic studies of the Bible, has compelled them to place themselves in no less patent antagonism with truth, justice, the Gospel, ignoring the spirit of the Gospel which is so superior to the letter, and than which there is nothing more divine! And how is it possible not to resist the Church, when one sees it by its logic and the fatality of its errors, breaking with what it should above all else defend and cherish?

The Dreyfus and Loisy affairs may seem far less important than the definition of the papal infallibility; but they impressed me quite as deeply, because they reveal the effect of the doctrinal poison infused in the Church by the Roman autocracy,—I mean the arbitrary will of man installed in the place of God's truth.

Can we seek the remedy in Protestantism, of which I shall say nothing ill but could say a great deal of good, if this were the place to enumerate the benefits we owe to it, and for which we are not sufficiently grateful? I think that Luther, together with Copernicus and Descartes, mark the starting-point of the modern spirit which has transformed and will continue to transform the world. All this does not prevent my being more than ever convinced that the Protestant Church, in the form and spirit in which we know it now, will never deliver us from Catholicism, because of its inability to replace it. There is an old saying that we can destroy only that which we are able to replace, and this is truer of religion than of anything else.

During more than three centuries, Calvinism (for it is Calvinism that I have particularly in mind), an outcome of the most generous manifestation of the French spirit and yet repellent to the most vital characteristics of the French disposition, has under pretext of spirituality proved itself incapable of creating a ritual.

One of the most venerated ministers of Geneva a short time before his death, (I would rather not mention his name which is widely known) wrote this: "The consistent Protestant is inexpressibly lacking in intelligence where the cravings of man's heart and imagination are concerned." And I can add that the Protestant misinterprets history, since he ascribes to the XVIIth century the origin of a new religious and moral Humanity, whereas it dates much farther back; and that, together with history, he ignores the most legitimate and essential metaphysics, developing instead a mystical sentimentality with the so-called Evangelicals and with the Liberals an agnostic rationalism, and in both cases given to a "sub-

jectivity" under its two forms so widely different and still so similar.

In the midst of this universal and irremediable decadence of the religious world, what is there left for serious and logical minds except Judaism? It will scarcely be necessary to remark that when I say Judaism I speak of principles, not men. I have little sympathy with the rich Epicureans, or skeptical scientists or sophists of this socialistic and anarchistic revolution, who have become too much assimilated with our so-called European civilization, and who have renounced, some openly, some in their hearts, the religion which has produced the greatness of their race. I am repelled by the gross ignorance and fanatical superstition of many Jews whom I visited in the East, but I respect their religious sincerity, and am filled with sorrow for their undeserved sufferings. As for the pious souls who still pray in the synagogues, they are not in such great numbers, or at least, not so much in evidence that I should mention them here. It will be the duty of faithful and courageous rabbis such as Benamozegh, the devout and learned rabbi of Leghorn, who wrote the beautiful book too little known, *Israel and Mankind*, to gather the true children of Israel into a living and active fold. I must, however, say here that there are signs of awakening, particularly among the women of Israel in America and Europe.

But whatever individuals may be, Judaism has its principles; the principles of one only God, father of all, imparting himself to all, without the necessary interference of any other person; the principle of a religion as simple as it is grand, suited in its essentials not only to one race or one period, but to all mankind and all times; the principle of justice, social as well as individual; in short of God's rule, not only over heaven but also over earth. Such is, without the least doubt, the spirit of the ancient prophets of Israel, and in the present failure of both Protestant and Catholic Churches, it is highly important that we should ally that spirit closely to the Gospel, which was to be its culmination, and which has been equally misinterpreted by the synagogue which rejected it, and by the Church which has failed to live up to it.

The Gospel of Jesus,—I mean the true Gospel of the true Christ—has remained in the upper air, judging the world by clouds in the sky, but without any connection either with the past or with the future. It was finished (as its Divine founder proclaimed, but in another sense) with the generation that had seen its birth. Herein lies the evil we should strive to remedy. "And I will send you the prophet," says the sacred Hebrew text, "and he shall turn

the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." (See Mal. iv. 6, the *Amen* of the Old Testament.)

The prophets and the Gospel were too sublime for mankind in their time. If the present generation does not understand it better, Judeo-Christian civilization will come to an end; and as mankind cannot perish, it will have to find its salvation in antique Paganism, reappearing transformed upon the world's stage. I say this in all seriousness and not without sorrow, comparing the paganism of Japan with the Christianity of Russia, and even with a certain German Christianity. I have just read in the newspapers two short utterances from two imperial poets, one by Emperor William II, the other by the Mikado. Which of the two is the real pagan,—which is the true Christian,—the one who invokes "Ægir, Lord of the wave" to "wage a cruel war upon a distant coast," or the one who opens his "ancient sacred books with one only solicitude: Are my people happy?"*

All great religious movements have originated in the East. An Oriental friend of mine, an eminent diplomat, who is, what is more important, a profound thinker and religious reformer, said to me quite recently: "Europe has had her scientists, and Asia has had her prophets; let us unite our forces, and maybe the world will see the beginning of a religious and social era, such as it has never known."

* Besides these quotations I refer the reader also to the two poems translated by Dr. Paul Carus on the first pages of the April and May numbers of *The Open Court*.