

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

The Right Thing for the Wrong Reason

L. A. C.

Philippine Studies vol. 1, no. 1 (1953): 71–75

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

NOTES and COMMENT

The Right Thing for the Wrong Reason

THE COUNTRY HAS JUST COMPLETED its season of graduation speeches. This year the period happened to coincide with the beginning of the presidential campaign and therefore graduation speeches were of more than usual significance, as they afforded an opportunity for aspirants and their supporters to impart their political gospel. This year, too, because of the current Masonic-Religious Instruction issue not a few orators in Catholic schools must have extolled the importance of religion as a part of the curriculum.

If past years may be taken as a criterion, many of these orators took as their platform, that religion deserves support because it is good for the state.

In holding that religion is good for the state, these orators were on sound philosophical grounds. The first thing religion does is make a *good man* and thus, so to speak, provide sound material to go into the composition of the state. Secondly since religion covers and motivates the whole field of human obligations, it must also promote the fulfillment of those obligations that man has as a member of society. And so in this way too, religion is beneficial to the state.

Father Pacifico Ortiz writing in the *Ateneo Law Journal* says:

“ . . . What is morally right . . . can never be politically or economically wrong . . . and the converse is also true; what is in truth politically or economically right can never be morally wrong. We presuppose, of course, that both politics and economics as well as ethics, get down to the ultimate reality of their essential ends. For at rock bottom, the demands of morality are but the demands of reality itself.”

Father Ortiz is talking here of morality and not of religion, but what he says is equally true of the relations of religion and politics. And the reason is the same: truth is one and can never lead to conflict with truth.

And many great statesmen could be quoted to substantiate this, for example, George Washington.

There is however a fallacy latent in the thesis as *presented* when it is worded that religion is important *because* it is good for the state. And that unfortunately is what very many mean when they praise the beneficial effect of religion in the curriculum. They mean: "This system of prayers and doctrines is not as empty and meaningless as it seems. It really is helpful to man's supreme end, namely to his service of his country."

Democratic nations, like the Philippines, reject the state-worship of systems like Nazi Germany, but in fact they frequently think much along the same lines. There is one transcendent value, that is, national welfare. That is the true worship, and the state is the true God. If religion can be shown to contribute to this, then the worth of religion is effectively demonstrated, and its existence is deserving of support and encouragement.

Now this is very fallacious. Religion is good for the state and must be good for any sound state. But if *per impossibile*, it were bad for the state, then it would be just too bad for the state, as the saying goes. In a conflict of state interests and religious interests, the state's would have to go under. It is much truer to say that the *state* is a good thing because it is good for religion, for then at least we are subordinating what is less important to what is more important. Man's end is to achieve immortality and everything he does in this life is to help towards that achievement. And this includes his association with other men in society, in a state. And one of the things a state does is enable man to pursue his strictly religious purpose in tranquility and safety. And therefore the state is good.

Historically religion has often not been good for the state. It is true that they were wrong states, but their rulers did not think so. These rulers were state worshippers like so many of our commencement orators, and they would have been willing to encourage religion if it had been good for the state, *their* state. The Roman Emperors did not think that Christianity was good for their state.

Elizabeth of England did not think that Catholicity was good for her state. Hitler did not think religion, Catholic or Protestant, and least of all Jewish, was good for his state. But the blood of a thousand martyrs testifies that religion does not stand or fall by such a test. If religion is not good for the state, there is something wrong with the state. Let the state mend its ways, and like a creature of God, fall in line with God's law.

Even Catholics seem to allow themselves to fall into this line of reasoning, and are at great pains to prove that the Catholic school is a national asset as if that were the highest thing that could be claimed for it, forgetting that religion has for its purpose man's duties *towards God*, who is so far above any state that the two authorities cannot be mentioned in the same breath. Catholics should not be trapped into this liberal monism which measures everything by the God-State. Their attitude should be: Catholic schools make good citizens; that is desirable but comparatively unimportant. What is infinitely more important is that Catholic schools make good Catholics.

C. L. Lewis in his *Screwtape Letters* has the Old Devil resorting to precisely this strategy, namely of advocating the *right things* for the *wrong reasons*. For those not familiar with this book, the *Screwtape Letters* describe a devil (Screwtape) at his infernal headquarters guiding and commenting on the efforts of another devil (his nephew) who is working on earth to wrest souls from Christ, who is uniformly called by Screwtape, *the Enemy*. These whimsical communications are full of profound spiritual wisdom. In one of them Screwtape writes:

Certainly we do not want men to allow their Christianity to flow over into their political life, for the establishment of anything like a really just society would be a major catastrophe. On the other hand we want, and want very much to make men treat Christianity as a means; preferably of course as a means to their own advantage, but failing that as a means to anything—even to social justice. The thing to do is to get a man first to value social justice as a thing which the Enemy [i.e. Screwtape's Enemy, Christ!] demands, and then work him on to a stage at which he values Christianity because it might produce social justice. For the Enemy will not be used as a convenience. Men or nations who think that they can revive the Faith in order to make a good society might just as well think they can use the stairs of heaven as a short cut to the nearest chemist's shop.

Fortunately it is quite easy to coax humans around this little corner. Only today I have found a passage in a Christian writer where he recommends his own version of Christianity on the ground that "only such a faith can outlast the death of old cultures and the birth of new civilizations." You see the little rift? Believe this, not because it is true, but for some other reason. That's the game. Your affectionate uncle, Screwtape.

The prevalence of this kind of reasoning with regard to morality may be ultimately traceable to the Old Boy, to Screwtape, but more proximately it is traceable to a philosophy which is very widespread in the Philippines, and which is imported from the United States, though of course it did not originate there.

This philosophy has two ingredients. The first is scepticism, especially in matters of morality and religion. The second is pragmatism, namely that whatever works is true. Therefore it concludes with regard to religion: "In any case we do not really *know* what is true and what is false in matters of religion, but religion of some kind, or any kind, is *useful* for the state, and therefore practically should receive support."

The acceptance of this position by men who do not dream of calling themselves pragmatists or sceptics, or philosophers of any kind, is a good example how the madness of the professorial chair seeps down through the newspaper columns to the masses, and so some barrio politico makes a speech at the local Sisters' school, and bases his approval of their work on principles that would warm the hearts of William James and John Dewey.

Catholics must be wary therefore of much of the seeming approval they get in non-religious quarters. It is an untrustworthy dog that can turn on them in other circumstances and rend them. A big industry for example promotes Catholicity because it keeps the workers sober and industrious, and protects them from Communism. But that same company would promote diabolism if it should seem to promise good business. Doctors favor the work of chaplains in a hospital, and the use of the sacrament of penance because these are good therapy, that is, these spiritual things are good because of their material effects.

Of course as far as Catholics are concerned, they are happy to have boulders removed from their path, though the workmen toil for motives that are indefensible. But we should make a mis-

take if we concluded that this sort of cooperation and approval means any real progress in the things of Christianity that count.

L. A. C.

The Historical Cancer

AMONG THE BOOK REVIEWS in this issue of PHILIPPINE STUDIES will be found one on Father Cavanna's *Rizal's Unfading Glory*. This book is such an overwhelming presentation of evidence for the retraction of Dr. Jose Rizal, that it seems here at last is an end of the controversy.

But anyone who surrenders to the temptation to draw such a conclusion will prove himself unfamiliar with the longevity of historical error and with the versatility of religious scepticism.

In the January 1953 issue of *Études*, Paul Doncoeur has an interesting article concerning another historical error which has been completely overthrown a dozen times, but has a dozen times risen to demand new refutation. And Doncoeur refutes it again! It is also about the edifying death of a national hero.

The story of Joan of Arc is a very familiar one to the Philippine public, especially since the showing here of the excellent moving picture portraying her life and death. Pere Doncoeur, the author of the article under discussion, spent sometime at Hollywood as "historical adviser" for this picture. What is not so generally known about Joan of Arc is, that from time to time writers who represented themselves as historians (or at least their publishers so represented them) have produced books attempting to establish an entirely different version of the Maid's life. She was not born in Domremy of Jacques Darc and Isabelle Romee but was a bastard born of Elizabeth of Bavaria and Louis of Orleans. She was not burned at Orleans, but because of the influence commanded by her high (if low) birth, escaped the stake (through the good offices of Pierre Cauchon and the English!), married a certain Robert of Armoises, and had two children.

Doncoeur shows how a recent book, *Was Joan of Arc Burned?* is simply a revival of this old misrepresentation. Forty years ago a similar book had appeared written by Save and called *Joan of*