

COMPOSITION OF PLACE

THE EDITOR

THE household of Faith is manifold but single: its unity demands a variety of race and culture and temporal allegiance, reconciled at the centre in Christ our Lord. In time and space, within the categories that men discern, the individuations that spring from historical change, or merely from human temperament, can seem more compelling than the hidden unity which transcends them. And an insistence on the universality that Catholic faith must bring;—the Church is one, holy, Catholic, apostolic, because in Christ there can be no division, because he is holiness, because he willed all men to be redeemed through himself and that redemption to be made accessible through his apostles—such an insistence can never ignore the integrity of men as endowed with shape and colour, with minds and wills uniquely given and to be employed in the context of the life they find. Nor can it ignore the varieties of society—enslaved or free—which the Church exists to redeem.

‘All things to all men’. It is part at least of the Christian apostolate: the source is one, but the streams go far. And a parish, mirroring the Church herself, may include at one end a monastery, at the other a prison. And in between, the infinite gradations of holiness or the lack of it: solid families of tradition, isolated converts, the rootless and the dispossessed. Behind walls the holy, behind other walls the publicly condemned; and the mission of the Church is to those and to everyone else besides.

In a stable world, with functions regulated and accepted as such, the redemptive work of the Church may seem easier to achieve. There remain communities, perhaps in hidden parts of Ireland or in Navarre, where the fragmentation of our age has not wholly destroyed an ancient hierarchy of living, where the Church has its known place and where its function is respected if not always obeyed. But it is to repudiate the mystery of redemption if one demands that such-and-such must be the conditions for the Church’s work. They may indeed be easier, but they can never be indispensable. For holiness and sin are alike indigenous to no special order of society. The Roman Empire in its pride, the

medieval city, the African jungle, the American metropolis, the Siberian prison-camp—all are to be redeemed, all have known sanctity and apostasy, God and Mammon. For the Christian life is achieved within the economy of grace, the freely-bestowed gift of God that looks for its fulfilment only in eternity.

So it is that the difficulties and disasters of our time can matter less than we suppose. At a time when the territory of iniquity seems so vastly extended, the temptation to despair is indeed near, but it is always to be refused. The conscious and wilful rejection of hope, the sin the theologians name despair, is no doubt readily known and its mortality of guilt acknowledged. But subtler is the temper of a conditioned acceptance of grace, the inclination to impose categories on divine providence. It may be a generous instinct, the defence of a partial good for the wrong reason. But it can be disastrous if it seems to identify the salvific work of Christ and the Church with secondary means, good in themselves, but dispensable, the products of time and change. The Catholic history of France in the last fifty years is sufficient evidence of the blessedness of adversity. The tyranny of a secular state is not to be welcomed, but its enactments can no longer be met by resort to the simple answer of arms. And its very injustices can evoke a fresh examination of the Christian conscience; can, by the sheer necessity of events, make some decisions easier. Secondary things and unessential alliances will not survive the stress of persecution. The purification of Catholic action, so that its limits are governed by the real needs of the Church and by nothing else, has been achieved, it is true, at the cost of much loss of evident power and honour. Yet the condemnation of the *Sillon*, and, later, of *Action Française*, so taxing at the time to those who had identified a temporal policy with the eternal mission of the Church, had consequences wholly good. And the instant submission of Marc Sangnier to the disciplinary authority of the Church—an example, one supposes, of the working of the 'Police State' which an unfriendly critic of the Church has recently deplored, was in fact an example of the basic liberty of the members of Christ. For liberty is most truly exercised when it is directed to the willing acceptance of the Church's authority as spiritual, redemptive and entirely divorced from a political opportunism.

Today, in Eastern Europe and Communist Asia the problem of the Church's freedom of action is certainly graver than any

recent comparison with France or Germany may suggest. And it must be an instant task of Christians to pray for the Church, that 'she may triumph over all hostility and error, and serve God in safety and freedom'. (Prayer of the Roman Missal *contra persecutores*.) The obligation of prayer does not dispense from a legitimate insistence on effective political action to demand the restoration of basic human liberties. Thus to suppose that 'economic relations' with a state can be separated from the sanctions of human rights as such, is to abandon the authority of the moral law in the affairs of nations. But in the end the Church will survive and triumph through her inalienable spiritual power, and the solidarity of Christians as yet free with their brethren in their captivity is a factor beyond the reckoning of the persecutors.

Whatever the future holds, the answer is at last certain: the gates of Hell shall never prevail against the Church. But understanding in judgment, faithfulness in prayer, unflagging hope and constant charity: these, perennial and unailing, take on a new urgency for the members of Christ's Mystical Body.

ORTEGA AND RELIGION

EDWARD SARMIENTO

ORTEGA as a philosopher has met with opposition from some Catholic circles within the Spanish-speaking world because he not only has apparently forsaken his own Catholic tradition but has ignored religion in his own philosophical scheme. If at most he can be said to have left a place for it, the place is so far unoccupied. It is true that very early in his career Ortega gave up the practice of religion and that at no time has religion in any pietistic way interested him as a topic. It is also true that he has always treated it with respect and he includes the religious sense as one of the five elements in his theory of values. (The others are goodness, beauty, truth and justice.)¹

¹ The most able study of Ortega from a religious point of view is that by Fr. Iriarte, S.J., *Ortega y Gasset, su persona y su doctrina*, Madrid, 1942. Less good is the Mexican Jesuit's *Pensamiento y trayectoria de José Ortega y Gasset*, Mexico City, 1943. Quite different, but not written from a systematically philosophical point of view is *En torno al pensamiento de José Ortega y Gasset*, Madrid, 1948, by the Revd Miguel Ramis Alonso.