

HERE IS THE SWORD

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OME sources, perhaps not too trustworthy, attribute to Voltaire the sentiment, "I may disagree with what you say, but I will die defending your right to say it." For many thinkers in America today, this dictum marks a glorious milestone on the road that led from the City of Shackled Minds to that Utopia, Intellectual Freedom. Certain historians liked to laud any deviations from orthodoxy that appear in Christian thinkers. Witness the almost universal popularity, for example, of Abelard. "Isabelle the Catholic, a queen among queens!" is the judgment of history. "But that sordid Inquisition business, how unfortunate!" The Index, too, is cited as just one more example of *Tiber Tyranny*.

This paper is not going to be a pugnacious polemic in which, the strawman having been duly torn to tatters, the hero returns from the field with victory banners agreeably flapping in the breeze. Such works merely serve to convince each party to the dispute of the essential rectitude of his own position. Society has come upon evil times and thoughtful men are examining the philosophies that have brought these evils about. They will condemn no inquiry with a perfunctory, "Look at the source," if only that inquiry be reasonable.

Action, if it be human, must flow from thought. First the theory, then the attempt at its realization; first Nietzsche, then the Nordic super-race. Not necessarily that the transition from the ideal to the real order immediately follows upon the promulgation of the theory; generally speaking, it is bandied about for a generation or two by the intellectuals, gradually finding a wider and wider audience in the lower strata of society. Then all at once some fire-brand, whose talents lie in action rather than in thought, decides that now is the time for the actualization. Thereupon follow the fireworks.

Let us therefore examine that celebrated statement, reputedly Voltaire's, if only because it has been part of the bed-rock upon which modern thought has rested so securely and so long. A superficial glance reveals it to be a beautiful thing; universal tolerance, respect for the rights of each and all, are two of its connotations. Yet, if we look deeper, something not so pleasant becomes patent.

What would you say of the great Pasteur, had he enunciated something of this nature? "I may not like the way you germs are wreck-

ing havoc in the silk and wine industries and the way you attack human life itself, but I will die defending your right to do it." Even kindness itself would permit us to say that here indeed was a case for Abnormal Psychology.

If we use all the means in our power to check the onslaught of the body's foes, by what logic do we allow to run rampant through the body politic those fell diseases of the mind that portend so much evil to society, diseases which have in fact already malignantly infected parts of that society?

Given a Christian culture such as that of Medieval Europe, the Faith of which was shown on rational grounds to be eminently worthy of men's credence, what could be more in accord with reason than such a statement as this: "Since Faith rests on Infallible Truth, its contrary cannot be demonstrated?" Here was an objective norm for evaluating the intellectual pursuits of men. If their works were in accord with that norm, well and good. And the boundaries of orthodoxy were not so confining to mental genius that true progress would be hampered. (A St. Albert the Great, for example, a man of prodigious mind, no less an empiricist than a philosopher, found no conflict between his catholic interest in man and nature and his Catholic duty as a bishop to preserve the purity of men's Faith.) But on the other hand, if their works conflicted with that norm in the judgment of prudent men, then those works were condemned just as an unhealthy dwelling is condemned today by those who are competent to judge in such matters. Abstracting from the application of these principles and viewing them purely on rational grounds, the question may be put: Can any thinker find a single irrational flaw in that thesis?

In the light of the foregoing, therefore, it should seem apparent that the check upon philosophic heterodoxy, the Inquisition,¹ the Index, and whatever else of this nature one can cite, so far from being shackles upon, are rather seen to be boons to, the minds of men.

The sixteenth century upheaval was not only religious, it was intellectual as well. It was radically intellectual because it substituted the subjective norm of the ego for the traditional, objective norm of Faith. Where before the norm was one, now it became multiple, varying as individuals. Is it any wonder that little by little such a Christianity should lose the respect of innumerable thinkers? Babel itself was no worse off!

Yet, through four centuries of intellectual confusion, one grand

¹ For a treatment of the Inquisition quite at odds with earlier versions see Walsh, W. T., *Characters of the Inquisition*. Kennedy, N. Y., 1940.

fact stands out like a beacon. There have always been men gifted with what for want of a better name we shall call 'right minds,' not right as opposed to left, but right as opposed to irrational. Their heritage could not give them a God that could satisfy their minds; their locale might have, but countless obstacles were rendering such a thing morally impossible. So they made them a god of truth and said, "We have found nothing worth worshipping but this." Their name was not legion for they were few in comparison to the great mass of mankind. And in unswerving fidelity to that god their minds had made, not a few of their number came to know and stayed to worship that God Who made their minds. For these men had held to the middle of the road, neither denying sense perception and becoming Pure Idealists nor denying the validity of reason and becoming Pure Realists. They saw an agency in the world that was unique in many respects, but most strikingly unique in that it could trace its history through an unbroken line of governors even to Him whence the Christian Religion derives its name. They examined the motives that made belief in that agency eminently reasonable. And by the Grace of that God their reason had shown them to exist, they embraced that agency.

Not all, however, embraced it. For the assent of Faith is not something we reason to. If it were, it would not be an assent of Faith. We mentioned above the rational grounds for credibility. The mind has a legitimate right to make such a demand as a condition for belief. Without it Faith were mere gullibility.

Happily enough, America has seldom been wanting in its share of 'right minds.' Certainly our own day is not destitute of them.² That perhaps is a fundamental reason for the measure of success that its democratic experiment has enjoyed.

When David in his flight from a jealous king took respite at Nob with the priest, Achimelech, he asked the priest if he could give him a sword. "And the priest said: Lo, here is the sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Terebinth. . . . If thou wilt take this, take it, for there is no other but this. And David said: There is none other like that, give it me."³ Here is the sword by which you, in the person of your forbears, hewed out a civilization from the chaos consequent upon the fall of the Roman Empire. Somewhere along the way you lost it; but that loss is not irreparable. If you will take this, for there is none other but this. Be

² To cite a single example: See: Max Eastman: *Socialism Doesn't Jibe with Human Nature*. Readers' Digest, June, 1941.

³ I Kings XXI, 9.

persuaded that if one age in its interpretation of the Christian Religion conflicts with another and that with another; if there be no harmonious continuity in those succeeding interpretations; then not only may the divine origin of that religion be called into question, but it proves itself unworthy even of the human faith that men are accustomed to place in profane history. And the reason is simply because that religion is manifestly self-contradictory.

But there is an ubiquitous agency in the world whose very presence denies the validity of those premises and those fell conclusions. And that agency is the Church of Rome. To you men of the mind indeed, but to all men in all times since that first Pentecost some twenty centuries ago, that agency offers a sword: an objective Christian Faith. The whole Christian world has got to be resurrected into a living, breathing unity. Only such a Faith as this can effect that unity not only because it has already proved itself capable of such a thing from history's annals, but because a subjective religion has, from its inception, tended to further and further disunion. If you will take this, take it, for there is no other but this.