

Leonardo Castellani

Christ and the Pharisees

Translated and published by Jack Tollers at Smashwords

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An apology from yours truly

I'm terribly sorry that my English isn't better.

Castellani's brilliant Spanish deserved the best translation possible, but the fact remains that, until now, no one with English as his first language has taken it up: to render Castellani in English, in very good English.

So here's my effort for what it's worth.

It has been done with a hope that our author's unsurpassed language (and perspectives) would shine through my meagre efforts.

In any case, bear with me, give it a try.

It may be worth it.

Jack Tollers

Prologue

Well known things to everyone
And that, however, were left unsung.

(José Hernández, Martín Fierro)

The whole life of Jesus of Nazareth as a man can be summed up in one standard expression: "He was the Messiah and he fought the Pharisees"—or perhaps even more briefly: "He fought the Pharisees".

That was the work Christ personally assigned to himself: his campaign.

All the lives of Christ that we know of follow other formulae: "He was the Son of God, he preached the Kingdom of God and confirmed his preaching with miracles and prophecies...". Very well, but what about his death? These biographies cut out his death, his single most important deed. They are lives written in a more apologetics like vein, and less so in a biographical one: Louis Veuillot, Grandmaison, Ricciotti, Lebreton, Papini, Mauriac...

In this manner, the tragedy of Christ's life remains hidden. The life of Christ was no idyll, it is not a romantic story nor an elegy, but one that played out dramatically: there is no tragedy without an antagonist. Christ's antagonist, and to all appearances a victorious one, was Pharisaism.

Without Pharisaism Christ's life would have been entirely different, not to mention the history of the whole world. His Church would not have been what it is today, and the universe would have followed another track, one entirely unimaginable for us, with Israel heading the People of God instead of what really happened to those who killed God and are now scattered all over the world.

Without Pharisaism, Christ would not have died on the Cross; but then, without Pharisaism, humanity wouldn't be the Fallen Race it is, and religion itself wouldn't be a religion either. Pharisaism is the worm of religion; and after the First Man fell it is an unavoidable one, for in real life as things stand

there is no fruit without its worm nor any institution without its own specific corruption.

It is religious pride: the most subtle and perilous corruption of the greatest of all truths, one that affirms that religious values are the highest. Yet at the very moment we attribute them to ourselves, we lose them; at the very moment we take to ourselves what belongs to God, they no longer belong to anyone—that is to say, unless they fall to the devil. As soon as one is conscious of it, the look of piety becomes a grimace. The saints' great doings are unselfconscious, in other words, authentic, or, to put it another way, divine: saints "suffer God" and in a certain sense do their work as divine automatons, just like people in love; without "self-awareness" as they say nowadays.

But get me right: I'm not saying they do these things without freedom, unconsciously and without premeditation; I'm simply establishing the "primacy of the object", which in the religious realm is a "transcendental object"—the primacy of contemplation over practice, of the intellect over the will—which nowadays some would call the preeminence of the Image.

The Pharisee is the man of practice and of will, in other words, a specialist in jesuitry and a Great Observant, a most law-abiding person.

There are countless "external" portraits of the Pharisee. You'll find the best one in the Gospels. In those books the Pharisee is not only depicted by Christ but you can also see him at work, how he acts against Christ. The underground work that culminates in the biggest crime of all shows up in sinkholes along the way, like the boils of a rash, leaving traces here and there of the disease, the psychological trend, though not revealing itself entirely, for the soul of a Pharisee is a dark and dismal thing. A Pharisee cannot write his own self-portrait.

It hasn't been done, and no one can. Molière's Tartuffe is a poor wretch, a fool, a vulgar and a base rascal who wears a transparent mask of piety. But your true Pharisee wears no mask; he himself is nothing else than a big mask. His nature has become a mask, he lies naturally since he has started by lying

to himself. His faked sanctity amalgamates with the egoist he is; these two ingredients melt to produce a dreadful poison that knows no antidote. Glycerin plus nitric acid equals dynamite.

It was Jesus of Nazareth fate to clash with Pharisaism; and once it began, a fight to death inevitably followed. This drama played out under strict determined rules as any good tragedy must. It was doomed for one that had assigned himself the mission of going to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" that he would have to confront those who were the cause of the ruin of Israel, that is to say the false shepherds, the wolves disguised as shepherds, in sheep's clothing.

Humanity has never witnessed a more acute conflict, nor one more dangerous and tragic than this one: living religion must live inside mummified religion without drying up, without giving up what it really is, like living sap flowing inside a dead trunk. That was Christ's difficult and delicate work.

The chair of Moses continues to be the chair of Moses. One must follow the words of those seated there without doing what they themselves do; and say a lot of other things that they leave unsaid, and must me said—words that make them jump like snakes: give "witness unto the truth". This is what has to be done, not forgetting the other thing.

This thorny work rips Jesus' heart, making visible its interior. How can we possibly be devout lovers of the Sacred Heart without knowing it? And how could we possibly know it without entering it? These days one can find heartless people who celebrate his Sacred Heart.

So then, the invisible thread that links every one of Jesus' acts, defines his character and uncovers his heart, is none other than his tremendous faceoff with these corruptors of religion. The religious conflict blows up as soon as Christ makes his first move preaching in public as a prophet in Cana of Galilee. The religious opportunists say: "What's this?", "What is This Man doing?" They were already on the alert after hearing John the Baptist's vociferous preaching. This One had just been authorized and proclaimed by the Other One.

It's symptomatic that the rough penitent from Makeron was put to death by a lustful man, while Christ was brought to his by puritans. As Christ himself noted, Pharisaism is a hundred times worse than other vices. Pharisaism is a spiritual vice, in other words, a diabolical one, for the corruptions of the spirit are worse than those of the flesh. It is a compendium of all the spiritual vices: avarice, ambition, conceit, pride, wilful blindness, ruthlessness, cruelty; that has diabolically emptied the inside of the three theological virtues, and thus constitutes the "sin against the Holy Spirit": "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do."

The deviations of the flesh are corruptions; but the deviations of the spirit are perversions. The Great Incest is to copulate with oneself, to make oneself God. That's what the devil did in the beginning, the Great Homicide.

Why do we say "sin against the Holy Spirit"? Because the Spirit is the Love that unites the Father and the Son, the Love that takes a man out of himself and brings him to God. Thus, Pharisaism is a sin without cure, a love that twists all actions and even twists that which was made to untwist the twisted. It distorts "il Primo Amore", the First Love as Dante called it.

Since the Pharisee is divine in his own eye, all his deeds are also seen as divine. There is no point sharp enough to pierce this coat of mail, these scales more serried than Behemoth's—not even the very Word of God, that two-edged sword. The Word of God itself has been hammered out to make this coat! In Christ's day the Pharisees put it on, dressed as they were with all their frills: headbands, fimbriae, stoles and phylacteries!

Referring to the shod carmelites, disalced Saint John of the Cross pointed out: "They are tainted with the vice of ambition and so they colour every one of their deeds so as to make them look good; and in that way, they're incorrigible." Ambition in religious people sometimes becomes a stronger passion than lust among their secular counterparts: it is one of the finest points of Pharisaism: they "love the chief seats... and love salutations in the marketplace", the vain honor that men tribute.

But the flower of all Pharisaism is cruelty: a sly one, a cagey, patient, prudent and low cruelty. And all the time "whoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service". Pharisaism is essentially a killer of men and God. And when it kills a man it does it because of God's part in its victim.

Instinctively, with more certainty and swiftness than a hound smelling a hare, the Pharisee detects and hates true religion. He is its enemy and antagonists have a way of recognizing each other. He knows for certain that if he doesn't kill the other man, he will be killed himself.

From then on, he that lives a genuine religiosity will always know that whatever he does will be considered evil, all his deeds will be seen as criminal. Scripture in his lips will only be blasphemy, truth a sacrilege, miracles works of black magic and lo!, if in a sudden outburst of righteous indignation he resorts to violence, even when the only damage results in a couple of well delivered blows and the bringing down of a few tables... Well then, the death sentence will be passed.

And all the time this drama plays out in silence, out of the light, deceitfully and by means of complicated combinations. The illegal death of a man, a cruel and wicked one, is decreed in gatherings where people invoke the Law with texts in their hands, in solemn religious conclaves, which include dialogues and sentences where practically no one says nothing that is not in Holy Scriptures, freely quoting for their purposes the most sacred words in the world. "Verily I say unto you: they will not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

And all means serve their purpose if they are secretive enough: slander, bribery, deceit, distortion, false witnesses, threats. Caiaphas killed Christ with a summary of Isaiah's prophecy and the dogma of Redemption: "It is expedient for us that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

That is Christ's tragedy. That is how our Saviour died. All his gentleness, all his sweetness, all his tameness, all his kindness, his moderation, his eloquence, his entreaties, his tears, his flights, his warnings, his imprecations, his

prophetic threats, his artistic talent, his blood, the mute imploration of the Eccehomo, were only to crash against the rock hard heart of the Pharisee; you can make sons of Abraham out of rocks more easily than from those who deem themselves justified because of the fact that they are from Abraham's blood.

It is Christ's and his Church's drama. If in the course of the centuries, an enormous mass of pain and even of blood had not been shed by other Christs in their resistance to the Pharisee, the Church today would not have subsisted. Pharisaism is the biggest evil on earth. There wouldn't be Communism on earth if it weren't for Pharisaism in religion; according to Saint Paul's words: *Oportet haereses esse...* "There must be also heresies among you..." (I Cor. XI:19).

And in the end, it'll get worse. In the last days, triumphant Pharisaism will require for its cure the universe's total conflagration and the coming of the Son of Man Himself, but not before devouring the lives of innumerable men.

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Christ and the Pharisees

These days the worst evil that corrodes and threatens our Catholic religion is "exteriority" (or should we say "externality"?)—the same evil to which the Synagogue succumbed.

The main point of dissent between Catholics and Protestants originally was all about externals. Protestants protested against a Church that had become an imperialism of sorts, they rebelled against a Faith that had become only ceremonies and philanthropy, against a Faith that had become more and more exterior: so they appealed to inwardness.

The Protestant rebellion marks historically the very moment in which religious exteriority broke the balance and seriously threatened inwardness. Certainly, no amount of rebellion or disobedience would cure the Church from this ailment; and that's how Protestantism not only did not remedy the evil, but, in fact, worsened it. Protestantism is an uprising against an imperfection that rather than turning it into a perfection, becomes a permanent rebellion—as its very name witnesses so clearly. To live "protesting" cannot constitute a religious ideal. One protests once against an abuse; and then one begins to live a life against the abuse in question or at least remains uncontaminated by it. He that keeps protesting wants others to do away with whatever he deems evil: he cannot or will not remove it himself.

But it's always possible to remove an abuse in itself; and that's the best way to protest against it. Luther protested against an abuse in the case of the indulgences and after that he himself abused the indulgence that was shown to him.

But Protestantism took away with itself a great captive truth. It wasn't all wrong. How could God possibly let the better half of Christendom fall into the clutches of heresy, and that by the agency of a syphilitic king and a coarse and bestial monk as they usually portrait Henry Tudor and Luther in most

"Histories of the Counterreformation"? Little do they honour God those who conceive such an enormity.

If half of Europe ended up following and welcoming the religious uprising, that is because the whole of Europe had sunk into the worst religious crisis in world's history (the worst one ever recorded, there's still a worse one to come): Pharisaism was about to choke religion. Externals were devouring the true Faith.

It's easy to prove. How did it all start? With the question of the sale of indulgences. Was that a mere pretext? Did it happen by chance? Was it all much ado about nothing? Impossible.

The "indulgences" are nothing but a translation into externals of dogmas of the Faith that are true if they are sustained by interior life; however, their external translation can easily betray them to the point of turning them into the following monstrosity: "Give me your gold and I'll give you grace."

That is religious externality in its extreme form.

The anonymous author of the "Lazarillo de Tormes" ridiculed what he called the "bulero" and with that the papal bulls and all manner of religion turned into a purely exterior thing, the trading of rites. And the Spanish common people invented this short story:

At the door of a church, a sexton of the XVth Century asked alms for the souls in Purgatory charging five pesetas for every plenary indulgence, backing his request with a big tableau behind him that depicted half naked bodies submerged in an enormous blaze with a notice that read: "A five peseta coin that enters and a soul gets out".

A villager let fall a five pesetas coin on the tray saying "for the soul of my father" and afterwards asked: "Did he get out?" To which the sexton answered pointing at the notice. So the surly man picked up his coin saying "Well then, now that he's out, let's hope he isn't foolish enough to get in there again."

I remember that a red Catalan from Manresa once said to me in 1947, when in every Spanish church there was preaching and a "Bull for the Saintly Crusade"

was offered: "Are you really saying that a man has the power to turn into a mortal sin (through which I lose my eternal destiny, the end to which I was created) by my deed of eating stewed meat? And that after that, if I give this man a coin, do you really believe that this man has the power to turn things around in such a manner that eating that pot of meat is no longer a mortal sin?"

Because this is what happens: a man stands up and says: "From now on, anyone who eats meat on Fridays does a terrible thing, punished with hell itself; but if he gives me a coin, eating meat on Fridays ceases to be a sin and becomes a harmless thing, as it was before."

Indulgences can be justified theologically and even when it's a rather complicated affair it is undeniably a logical one too. But if those syllogisms are to make up a true religion and not become the ridiculous framework of externality, then its subjects and priests must be God fearing people with a lot of Faith and much humbleness in the way they go about their rites: things hard to come by during the XVIth Century. In other words, the old pardons of the Primitive Church, based on a profound sense of sin, of mercy and the martyr's merits, had dried up inwardly and had become a more and more external practice; to the point that the devil of trade introduced itself into the empty shell.

No one can seriously suppose that the contention over the indulgences was an accidental occurrence or a mask that concealed one friar's arrogance, a product of badly baptized princes or the consequence of an entire nation poorly evangelized; that dry material wouldn't have ignited without the flame of anger that burnt in so many souls outraged by religious externality.

You'll find another symptom of what I'm saying in the famous "Rules for feeling with the Church" established by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises. These "rules" were directed against the spirit of those times, against Protestantism, and all of them defend religious externals, surely a praiseworthy thing in itself if you remember that the exterior is also necessary since man is not a pure spirit. A commendable thing for those times, anyway.

Saint Ignatius was Counter-Reformation's champion. With his mystical soul, after his conversion in Manresa and once in Paris, he took upon himself the main needs of the Church in those days and there and then founded his Company. There it was that he wrote these "rules" as a supplement to his book: "Praise the burning of candles—praise ceremonies and rites, praise long prayers at Church, conventual life, the scholastic tradition." This Basque even goes to the dangerous extremes of demanding faithful obedience to the ecclesiastical hierarchy in such terms that even if you see "white" you'll admit it's "black" when the Church authorities say so. In short, he recommends to do and say what appears to be *oppositum per diametrum* (as he puts it) to what the Reformers were doing: a very good recipe in tactical terms, but a dangerous formula in theological ones, for it is much too simple. The devil would've felt quite content if Christ had done the exact opposite of what he suggested to Him in his three temptations.

"Praise effigies, praise ceremonies and the burning of candles in the churches, praise long vocal prayers, vigils and fasting, scholastic philosophy, collections, conferences, Catholic activities, religious teaching", and so on. In those days it wasn't a bad agenda, especially in Spain, for Spaniards love to contradict each other whenever they can. They say a Spaniard once said to another one: "Hello, Manolo, it's a long time that I haven't seen you, but, well, well, well, how changed you are; to tell you the truth you don't even look like Manolo now!". And when the other one retorted: "Excuse me sir, but I'm not Manolo..." the man only insisted: "Oh! So you're not Manolo! Well then, I only said as much!".

I'm not so sure that "to praise the burning of candles" would do much good in these days. To put up a burning candle on an altar or, for that matter, six plaster statues (in 1953 the Council of Buenos Aires prohibited to put more than seven per altar) amounts to a minimum of religious feeling: it is an external act that substitutes and sometimes may summon spiritual motions. But if these acts don't summon inward feelings and only act as surrogates, it would be better to refrain from doing such things. In any case, those outward

acts and the religious feelings they rouse are not to be praised (praise must be reserved for the very best things) and only tolerated or allowed, in the best of cases. You'll find no praise of candles in the Gospel, and we can well think that Jesus Christ never lighted one; he prayed under starlight and reproved those who prayed ostentatiously: in fact He ordered us to pray secretly. So this whole affair of "praising those who burn candles" for all I know could've been a good thing for Spaniards centuries ago; but there's no harm in not insisting on this sort of thing.

However, setting aside this whole business of candle-burning, our point here is that the very champion of the Counter-Reformation formulated his main contention against the Reformation on the same level that his adversary had chosen: the total acceptance or total rejection of external religious acts.

If nothing more were to be said, if you read this stormy saxon monk's life you'll easily find that before his conversion he was up to his eyes indulging in external religious acts to the point where he suddenly reverts violently to a purely inward religion—from the moment an associate of his was struck by lightning, a fact that induced him to take up religious orders until this business of the indulgences came up and he jettisoned it all. In his time, he was a Provost of sorts or a subprior in charge of no less than seven convents of his Order with quite a work overload, dealing with basically secular affairs never mind if they appeared to be sacred ones, to the point that he hadn't time for praying the breviary—so finally he was exempted from it, because he was "sacrificing himself for the good of the community" as Alphonse Daudet's funny monk would have put it. He himself noted the case in his peculiar way: "If all this friarly stuff could save a friar, no one has practiced it more than me; but it didn't do me much good." When he jettisoned all this "friarly stuff" and said "only the faith, the faith alone saves us and not our (external) works, the internal faith coated with Christ's merits like a cassock", he wasn't aware that he was throwing away religion's crust and skeleton and even the meat, disembodiment the faith and leaving it like a flayed mollusk that is tossed into the storms of imagination or else into the steely armor of Pharisaism.

And he didn't realize this because he was an Occamist—or a Cartesian as we would say today. He didn't understand the subtle distinction between matter and form, hylomorphism. He thought that pure forms could subsist on a purely human level. But, in fact, among human beings pure forms devoid from matter cannot subsist, not even on a religious plane.

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The sweet Nazarene

Some philosophers are currently saying that religion is a much too masculine affair, while others maintain that its feminine side is unwisely highlighted.

In his book, "Les Mystères de l'Orient", Dimitri Merejkowski says that Christianity has masculinized itself excessively allocating to God the traits of one of the sexes to the detriment of the feminine elements in beings; which, he contends, in the Primitive Church was represented by the person of the Holy Spirit; whose name, in fact, in Hebrew is a feminine one.

On the other side, an Austrian Jesuit, Ritschl, and a German one whose name I can't remember now, have written a pair of mediocre books recently translated into Spanish complaining that nowadays Catholicism has underlined its feminine side much too much, to the point that it has become a women's religion: whose only object is the "Sweet Nazarene" that Constancio Vigil depicts, duly symbolized by the abominable religious statues that represent those bland Christs with fair mops of hair, his index finger pointing at an open heart.

But the truth is that the Christ that emerges from the preaching one hears these days is not much of a man, nor of a woman either: he's more of a concept, if you ask me. They have shredded his personality, no less; and that necessarily means that the man himself has been suppressed; and consequently God Himself has been abolished, God who is a Person (or Three Persons), and whom is no abstract idea. The Christ they depict is there only to hold up morality; he props the "social mores"—that these days don't amount to much more than a stale morality; the same sort of by-product that the Pharisees had stemmed from Moses and Abraham.

Big slices of the Gospel that make preachers uncomfortable and that are difficult to put into practise have been jettisoned; naturally, the remains look rather incoherent and its bits and pieces can be put together in several ways;

from where proceed a number of forged Christs that plague modern times.

Renan's Christ, the great and idyllic plebeian moralist; the Christ of Strauss, the dreaming poet; the resigned man of sweet sadness that Tolstoy depicts; the immense compassion opened to the world's iniquities as Schopenhauer would have it; the jurist and legislator of all case-by-case moralists; and finally the Sacred Heart of pious nuns, protector of all confirmed spinsters...

As the Bishop once said to the Philosopher: "Believe me, sir, the Sacred Heart has saved you... The Sacred Heart saved you from that car-crash." The philosopher held his head high and said: "The goodness of God cannot be proved by experience".

And he was right, up to a point. God's goodness can be mystically experienced but cannot be properly proved with experiments. Quite on the contrary, many people find that their experience of the world seems to prove exactly the opposite.

Christ's personality has been suppressed because his portraits omit his most distinctive trait by leaving out his essential mission. A man is defined by the work of his life: and in Christ's case, that was his fight against the Pharisees.

"Do you mean that a good beating can save a soul?". "No", is the usual answer. But if a good beating can't save a soul, Christ wouldn't have delivered any beatings. And the Gospel tells us about at least two terrific thrashings he gave the money changers when cleansing the temple.

Suppress Christ's manly outrage and you suppress his very manhood. Manly outrage has been suppressed from the list of Christian virtues. And a just indignation with all its gestures and effects is a virtue.

"Should a priest dare to take risks on account of a woman?" "Not so." In any case, most priests do not venture anything for women, nor for men, for that matter.

But Christ dared to save a damsel in distress, and on top of everything a disreputable one. In those times for a priest that meant terrible things: it brought absolute discredit on him. A Pharisee that touched the shadow of a

woman walking the streets had to purify himself. As one can easily imagine, it seems that when they weren't on the streets that was another story.

Bigotry and prudishness are typical signs of Pharisaism; your saints curse anything carnal, as if they hadn't been born from a woman—which is not a sign of a chastity, quite the contrary. They feign to consider everything sexual as essentially unholy.

They despised women terribly; and were followed by lots of them, which is remarkable. Josephus says that much to their profit they socialized with rich women, and that they were held in much reverence by women in general.

There's a tendency in women to bow down to those that mistreat them. But this rather morbid leaning doesn't explain the whole case. Most probably, these women respected the Pharisees out of simple religiousness.

They say that women are more religious than men. It simply isn't true. But what is true is that women need more externals, a secure religion, an encoded, represented and social one. And the Pharisees provided just that.

"Women follow him"—was one of the charges the Pharisees brought up against Christ; a case of jealousy of their clientele. "Women go after him!", "He deals with publicans and prostitutes..."

And finally, to give another example, is it proper for a religious man to resist "Authority"? It is not appropriate to resist any authority whatsoever.

"Work for the Church, work for the Church!" said the Pharisees. What could be more holy? But they never said: "Work for God's Church!". They were the Church.

We've got it wrong: they didn't say "for the Church" but "for the Law". And yet, it's the same thing. They didn't say "for God's Law". They were the representatives of God: with that, everything had been said. Work for us.

The right formula is: "Work for God's Law, because it is God's, because it belongs to God, and only to that extent. Don't work for excrescences and outgrowths that man always introduces into the Law".

Those excrescences had grown so much in Christ's time that they stifled the Law. So it was time to simply say, like Christ did: "Work for God. That's all."

In a plebeian mentality, the law always tends to cover and darken the very reason of the law. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath", Christ used to say. He wrote Man with a capital letter; the Pharisees wrote Sabbath: the Idol emerges, one contrary to Life.

Alas for the people when Authority starts being written with a capital letter! Then it takes the place of Truth, which this time, indeed must be written with a capital letter, given that it is God Himself.

Our world knows perfectly well what it means when the State is written with a capital letter: the State with a capital letter is equivalent to organized immorality.

Who said so? Saint Augustin said it, and Nietzsche also; in a different sense.

The Pharisees were very patriotic: in Christ's days, the "Fatherland" stood for a clique of robbers armed to the teeth; the Roman's fatherland as much as the Jewish one.

That's why Christ refrained from pronouncing himself and refused to be dragged into the heated "nationalist" discussion, despite the fact that many in his audience wanted precisely that. "I refuse to take sides in party politics and contests of iniquity." Never mind: before Pilate they charged him of being another "nationalist".

"Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." The coins have Caesar's image stamped on them. Do not use the sword to retain that gold: let yourself be stripped of that gold by the Caesar. You shall become poor! That is not very important. The other thing is much worse; the other thing is suicide.

But just by saying this, it ended by being a suicide of sorts: telling the Truth.

Christ payed his tribute to the Caesar, after setting the record straight to the effect that He was under no obligation to do so. He did a miracle to pay it; a

miracle from a fairy tale: he pulled out a fish from the sea and from this fish he pulled out a golden coin. The fish signified Himself; the coin signified his doctrine; the fish died to give it.

The true tribute that Christ payed to the Roman Empire was his blood; that is why he was under no obligation to pay any other sort. They extracted that tribute from him by force "to be a witness of Truth".

Even with his blood he preached respect for authority along with the super-respect for God: "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above."

The respect for authority that Saint Paul sternly preached didn't stop him preaching the truth: the proof is that he spent a long time in prison and finally was executed.

Nowadays, for lots of faithful people and clerics (and the faithful because of the clerics), respect for authority has become "political opportunism"; one must defer to anyone who's on the winning side; you're supposed to support the party that gives money to the Church—sometimes, things get even worse and authority becomes an idol and is justified even when it commits injustices. "Tell that fox to come and fetch me"—Christ said. Christ did not feel any respect for Herod's crimes.

The fight against this terrible deviation from the sacred is an undertaking in itself, a man's venture. That was Christ's venture, what he did as a man, what gives unity to all his deeds, the thread that connects his life to his death; his "Mission": the heart of his personality.

This struggle drove Christ to display all the virtues: the masculine and the feminine ones. His weapon was the word. The result was the setting-up of a new religious society, a vessel for Truth. The Truth... *Quid est veritas?—Est vir qui adest.* * He was the Truth: total truth in body and soul.

Christ was a man in the full sense, with the sensitivity of an artist; and the artist has "a bit, or more than that of a woman"—said the poet. Because of that... Nietzsche, the atheist, for all his tremendous anti-Christian prejudice,

stopped short before the figure of Christ. He dimly sensed what a character he was and admired him without quite knowing it. "To be entirely frank, of the true Jesus we know nothing"—he said, trying to shake off the deference he felt. But the case was that he himself knew nothing, misled as he was by the Protestant tradition in which he had been brought up and which he rightly regarded with suspicion.

Nietzsche asked himself if Jesus in fact hadn't been a mystical aristocrat. That he was: an aristocrat in the nietzschean sense, that is to say, a soul of absolute nobility, with integrity beyond doubt, wholly free. And a mystic just as the German himself, even if he himself attacked "mysticism", false mysticism.

"Didn't the Pharisees get it wrong," he goes on to say, "believing him to be a plebeian, a demagogue of sorts?"

No, they were not mistaken. They felt him to be what he was, a king, a dethroned king, and therefore a nobleman and a man of the people too—and they hated him for it. They themselves, who had usurped the theocratic authority. The opposite of a nobleman is a fake nobleman, not the ordinary man of the street. Noblemen and ordinary people suppose each other, something Nietzsche failed to see (that is why his remarkable moral order fails from its very inception).

The Pharisees were phonies, fake noblemen, false aristocrats, a sham "élite". The crystallization of ethics converted into external precepts is a typical trait in a plebeian; just as an undistinguished intelligence will characteristically confuse ends and means, nearly always maliciously.

When a nobleman doesn't find his place, he seeks the last place. This is what Christ did when he found the people in such an appalling situation. He realized in himself the Parable of the Great Banquet: he took the lowest place until he was invited to the highest, always knowing that he belonged there. He sank to the lowest station among the populace knowing that the throne was his rightful place.

"A nobleman takes a vengeance on the injustice he suffers hurting himself even more. He resists oppression oppressing himself a little more."

Chesterton's maxim seems foolish; but it's not, it is nothing else than a translation of the gentleman's code of turning the other cheek and of letting who took away your coat have your cloke also. That's what Christ did. It isn't equivalent to Tolstoy's sheeply rendering of nonresistance to evil. It is a lion's gesture, not a sheeply one.

You exile me for a year?

I exile myself for four!

The Lion of Judah, the Son of David... People weren't deceived about Christ's personality. They saw a leader. They were foxed by the type of leadership he embodied. They wanted to make him a king; a temporal king and a revolutionary as the Pharisees would have it and taught them to believe.

They didn't see in him the man of "infinite resignations" that Tolstoy saw... and Almafuerite. Those are no good as leaders.

"Seuls les coeurs de lion sont les vraies coeurs de père..."

That's why it's a fine thing to put fire in Jesus's Heart; but none of the ambiguous modern fires: the fires of romantic passion, the sparkler fire of effeminate sweetness.

Consequently Catholic religion is not too masculine, nor too feminine. These days it is an unbalanced religion where both the masculine and feminine aspects have been exaggerated in order to flatter a cheap and ignorant public: for instance, the masculine aspects of what is legal, prescriptive and disciplinary with which bossy clerics sometimes think they are ruling the world —and they're only doing harm; or the feminine aspects of tenderness, of what is conciliatory, a certain indifferent benevolence with which other rascals (sometimes they're the same people) easily conquer audiences and are followed by flocks of fans.

In short, nowadays, Christ's religion, such as it is presented, is an unhuman religion, a dehumanised, a disembodied one (and, therefore, you'll find no

man or woman here)—at least that's the religion preached by countless charlatans and the one you encounter in the practices of lots of self-righteous Pharisees.

Because the supreme completion of the Pharisees' leaven results in a dehumanised religion and in that way they have successfully refashioned it into an ungodly thing; and that—strange thing—by making it too human; I mean, much too much like themselves; absolutely excluding any other "spirit". "You hath a devil spirit, you hath a bad spirit"—they said to Christ.

"Anyone with a different spirit from mine, hath a bad spirit"; at heart, that is what a Pharisee thinks.

The opposite is exactly true.

*

Thrice assaulted

If I hadn't watched out,
the bastard would've speared me.

(José Hernández, Martín Fierro)

Before being legally killed, and that in a disgraceful manner with great luxury of torments, Jesus Christ was the object of several murder attempts. The Gospels remembers three.

In his third trip to Jerusalem, for the feast of Skenopegia, and perhaps much before, Jesus calmly questioned his opponents:

"Why do you want to kill me?"

Those spontaneous attacks from the mobs that fail mysteriously, stem from the slanders the Pharisees spread about him.

"Who wants to kill you? You hath a devil!"

They were calling him possessed over and over again.

Evidently, nothing could be better for the Pharisees than a sudden tumult and assassination of the young prophet by the mob. They much favoured the indefinite pronoun: Monsieur "On" is irresponsible and sacred. To go by historians à la Michelet, the French Revolution was Monsieur's On's doing. Augustus Cochin calls it "Monsieur On's ordeal":

"On se facha, on courut aux Tuileries, on appella le Roi... on le tua."

Augustus Cochin investigated who the devil was Monsieur On. In his findings he discovered that behind the formless movements and the rabble's apparently spontaneous outbreaks, there were perfectly organized groups moving in the shadows that operated with precise plans, secret agents and specific orders. Monsieur On doesn't exist.

The Gospels tell the same story when they deal with the question of the Barabbas plebiscite. The chief priests and the sanhedrites "moved the

people"—they "shook them", says Mark—inducing them to vote in favour of Barabbas and against Jesus.

The first attempt against Jesus Christ took place in his home town, or at least so it was thought ("in patria sua, ubi erat nutritus"); he didn't want to do any miracles in Nazareth (or rather, as Mark explains "he couldn't") and they were furious. He couldn't do any "because of their incredulity"; and yet they seemed to be extremely credulous for they expected him to realize more miracles there than anywhere else because it was "where he had been brought up". So he read in the synagogue Isahias' prophecy on the miracles the Future Anointed one would do, then he closed the book and he gave it again to the minister ("and the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him"), and he began his explanation saying: "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

But after that, when they saw that he didn't do more miracles than those realized in Capernaum (for he only cured a few sick) and when he explained the paradoxical reason for that: "precisely because this is my home town", they were filled with wrath and rose up and thrust him out of the city. And after that, "they led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong." Why they actually didn't, is not known. He just passed "through the midst of them and went his way." Perhaps his very composure prevailed.

The small-town bout of wrath, this mob of foolish people, this frustrated and unmotivated homicide, are all strange things. But it's not that wonderful: behind all that we find what Jesus himself called "the leaven of Pharisaism", the devil's hand of hypocrisy.

In the first place, the leaven of Pharisaism appears in the expectation of a bizarre Messiah, an arrogant type, a haughty jerk, and a belligerent one at that. And now they come up against this calm, sedated man, who even looks a bit melancholic! Over there, they all knew his father, his mother and his brothers James, Joseph, Judah and Simon and his sisters, the whole family; and they had seen him handling the plane and the hammer...

Still more pharisaic, the other result from the leaven of Pharisaism was that they recognized him as the Messiah, but wanted him to settle in Nazareth, where he was practically born. These national claims are natural and very common, and one could well think that Christ didn't think too badly of them. Haven't I heard similar claims in Italy and Spain, countries of deeply entrenched faith! Not to mention Argentina with its sleepyhead faith.

"God is Argentinian", "God is French", "God is German", "God is Spanish"... it seems that it suffices for God to hear these sort of things and he walks away without doing miracles. What can be so evil in these endearing appropriations so common among simple people? Christ said nothing more than this: "I don't do miracles here because I belong here; I do miracles in foreign lands."

God is a foreigner.

Nevertheless I'm continually hearing preachers promising God's special help, even miraculous help, to the natives of one region or the other for the only reason that they belong there, because of the deep and entrenched faith that has always characterized their people, because of the holiness of their fathers and their glorious traditions. That is an innocent form of Pharisaism.

But this innocent form of Pharisaism can well end up in an attack on Christ. When all is said and done, the very fact of delivering silly, vain, bumptious, sycophantic and hollow sermons to poor people constitutes an attack on Christ in its own right.

The two other attempts on Jesus' life took place in Jerusalem, in the Temple or nearby, when he went up there for the third time. They occurred in two different occasions and not once, twice told. John himself told them and his narratives are entirely different. One was in the Gazophylacium (the temple's treasury), the other at Solomon's Porch, one when the feast of Skenopegia (Tabernacles), the other during Hanukkah (Dedication of the Temple). In both occasions they took up stones to cast at him and also violently sought to take him. The first time, says John, he hid himself. On the second occasion he escaped out of their hand.

Both times the attempted murder was because he said that he was God. Christ no longer veiled his divinity. He was already in his third year, he had sowed his walks with stupendous miracles.

Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

Verily, verily, I say unto you: before Abraham was, I am.

And the next time, even more explicitly:

I and my Father are one.

This statement is unique in the world, it is enormous. They should have executed him there and then; or conversely, kneel down before him. The great mystics have said that through love they actually were one, or else that they were made into one thing with God. Al-Hallaj the mystic says in a poem:

Before I was near You

You were near me,

Oh the Chosen One,

Now, near and far

Have disappeared.

But Christ says more: not only that he is made one thing with God through love, but that what he does, his Father does; what he says, his Father says; his Father lives and continually creates and he creates jointly. And that whoever sees him, sees the Father too.

For these legal minded Pharisees a great trial seemed timely enough. Clearly an enormous assertion had been put forward. It was time to set up a trial, requiring reasons, proofs and justifications; to sentence this man as the greatest blasphemer ever or else to go down on their knees before the "Principle that speaks in you", the Beginning of all things mysteriously become human nature, body and soul of a man.

But finally it all ended up in two or three cowardly gestures, in rogue motions and bigoted insults, in grunts and gossip and useless conversations, in vain and impertinent curses. What annoyance and weariness must have filled

Christ's heart seeing humanity carrying on in this muddy, dull and despicable manner!

But meantime the great legal assassination was being brewed, the main points layed out, the proper occasion anticipated, dark minds were losing their trepidations of messing things up, disregarding their fear of the populace and of their own overt responsibility, shaking off their horror of appearing with blood on their hands, these most "saintly and sapient" of men. Christ had already prophesied once, twice, and thrice his own death, with all its characteristics and circumstances.

He knew better than his enemies where he was going. If on three occasions he evaded his impromptu assassination it was because, says the mysterious Evangelist, "his time had not yet come". Pharisaism had to appear in its true light.

Religious pride is homicidal, it will even kill God. A son of the devil, it's the "first assassin", the root of death and the enemy of life. Pharisaism will kill even if it doesn't want to, not because of anything bad in its victims but precisely for what is divine in them. Of course, they don't want death, they're only interested, as they profess to be, in providing for the common good, entrusted by God to care for the best interests of religion and the salvation of all the people, so that "the whole nation perish not".

You should have seen these righteous people of the Temple checking those who wanted to stone Jesus and that were making a racket and yelling at the top of their voices: "Hold it! Hold it! Calm down, calm down! Wait a moment! Not yet! Let him talk a bit more! Let him explain himself! All in good time! Let the authorities take matters into their own hands. After all, we're at the Temple's Atrium! The very idea of staining with blood the Gazophylacium! There's too many people around, you could hurt a poor woman or a child here! He's with all his disciples! Today is the Lord's feast!

We must bide our time!

And once back in their premises: "What a hectic afternoon at the Temple! Had

it not been for us, the rabble would have lynched the man... But we prevented it. Of course, this man has overstepped his bounds. This is the limit. It's quite evident that this has to stop. But we must see 'how'... that's the important thing... how".

And when the "time" was right, they killed him in the most clumsy, rowdy, shocking, muddled, topsy-turvy way that you can imagine; though also (and this time their instincts didn't let them down) in the most horribly cruel fashion.

Oh Lord, give me enough strength to contemplate Pharisaism without too much fear, without too much disgust. But also, give me your grace so as to be able, like you, to look at it in its face.

*

The provocation

*An innocent pastime,
A harmless one at that,
Like spitting from a bridge,
Or getting yourself crucified.*

(Leopoldo Lugones)

Jesus Christ wilfully got himself killed.

German rationalist critics have argued so, in line with the Judaic-Talmudic tradition. What to do with a man that is constantly taunting the legally constituted authorities? That has a bad influence? That, albeit innocently, becomes a danger to the established religion and the thousands of faithful people that find their eternal salvation in it? "Subjectively, you may have thought you were acting properly; but objectively you have made a mess of things," said Caiaphas to Jesus with technical precision.

Why he got himself killed is explained variously: consciously or not; and if the latter, owing to religious bigotry or pastoral simple-mindedness; which is how Renan the fantasist has it. This last hypothesis is the most absurd of all. That the simple and candid "sweet Nazarene" let himself be drawn down by a chain of intoxicating popular successes without surmising the consequences until it was too late, is a supposition that one can hardly reconcile with all and every Gospel text. If we were to find grounds for the mere possibility of such a speculation, we would have to write four different Gospels, and for that matter quite opposite to those extant.

That religious passion blinded him, like Strauss explains it; that he thought he would overcome his enemies or at least miraculously be delivered from them by the agency of "twelve legions of angels" at the last minute, are all highly unlikely conjectures. The texts definitely say the opposite. Christ predicted his own martyrdom, reproached his enemies for wanting to kill him (they denied it

of course), hid himself, escaped from their hands more than once, as we have seen. These are hypothesis not to discuss, purely fictitious ones, a product of feverish imaginations. The very idea... If the Gospel texts are so deceitful that it suffices to hold the title of "German Professor" to interpret them the wrong way round, well then we know absolutely nothing about Christ. For heaven's sake, shut up.

But isn't it possible that he deliberately seeked his own death convinced that that was the world's salvation?

The question raises the subject of "the right do die for Truth", that is to say, the subtle "temptation of martyrdom" that the poet T.S. Eliot introduces as the fourth and most dangerous of all in his tragedy, "Murder in the Cathedral", where the saintly Archbishop Thomas of Canterbury overcomes it.

Has a man a right to make other men commit a murder in his person so that the Truth succeeds? What a man that would be! Whatever, but supposing that such a man exists, has he any right?

In Saint Cyprian's times there were Christians that brought persecution on themselves by toppling idols or manifesting their faith unseasonably. The Church condemned them; and they formed a heretical group called the "provokers". We have seen the same thing repeated in times of the English persecutions, above all on occasion of the Gunpowder Plot; an event that inspired one of the remarkable incidents in R.H. Benson's apocalyptic novel "The Lord of the World": the Christian that shoots Oliver Brand when he blasphemes and is lynched by the crowd; the conspiracy to blow up the Cathedral during the sacrilegious ceremony of the Adoration of Man that provokes Cardinal Percy Franklin's useless return... and Rome's demolition.

Of course, it must be said that these "crimes" avenge other crimes, enormous if you will. But, to sacrifice yourself without hurting no one? Didn't Christ do exactly that?

Kierkegaard the poet and mystical Danish pastor, experienced first-handedly a similar dilemma throughout his life; he got it wrong once, but finally resolved

it. It was Savonarola's quandary; it was Thomas More's, and perhaps Bartolomé Carranza's.

How should a Christian act in a decayed Church, let us say a corrupted one; a true man who's fate is to live in bad times? What does Faith require of him, and what is he allowed to do? May he keep quiet? Should he speak up? The plight complicates itself terribly with further questions. What is his public mission? To what extent is the Church corrupted? What positive effects can he expect if he cries out? How should he sound the alarm? The categorical commandment of "witnessing Truth" that was Christ's specific mission becomes a prickly one in Socrates' case, a distressing one in Kierkegaard's, and an unspeakably puzzling one for a simple layman.

Two extreme attitudes are illicit: one is to accommodate to error (the easiest way out), the other one is to provoke martyrdom.

Kierkegaard protested that he couldn't accommodate to the rampant ecclesiastic disorder that in fact led the faithful into errors and devastated the Faith. "I can't morally, and I can't even physically," he used to say. In my case, the word ministry which was bestowed on me when I was ordained has seen itself doubled by my native vocations of poet and teacher, a mission I cannot turn down without condemning my faculties to absolute idleness, and that would be tantamount to the ruin of my whole inward life. Whoever writes will know perfectly well that he cannot even physically resist the word that takes shape in him without abandoning himself to a torturing and dangerous contraceptional operation, like the suffocating and killing of fetuses, unfortunately a well known practice these days. If I cannot make myself useful in any other way than by writing and preaching, how could I possibly save my soul if I give up the fight?

In my case and in Barrantes Molina's * for instance, all this may be a bit over the top, I may be somewhat exaggerating; not in Kierkegaard's case however. He just couldn't keep quiet. Even his mental balance depended on his intellectual work. To shut up would have literally amounted to suicide; and the worst possible one, at that. "Must it be said? Well, then, we'll say it", was the

title of his last pamphlet consisting of ten articles on religion and the Lutheran Church, that, one surmises, he paid for with his life. He collapsed in a heap in one of Copenhagen's streets and died from sheer exhaustion at a hospital when the controversy he had sparked off was in full swing; but from the moment he decided to "say it" a composed joy followed him up to the last moment, a sign of divine approval, we suspect.

Because he had seen earlier on that "there is no right to die for truth", this is to say, to burden other people, even people wickedly deceived, with an assassination. Humility compels to shun martyrdom—or charity, or simple modesty: I'm not sure I can cope with such a thing, I'm not sure that I'm in possession of the whole truth; on the contrary, I'm practically certain that I'm not. What Christ couldn't say, all Christians must. There's a mix of passion and short-sightedness in me, even when I'm positive that I'm doing my very best to see things for what they are, that warns me that I'll never know for sure. Undoubtedly I must follow the truth I can see, I have no choice and I must live on; but that is for me only, not to impose on others.

How can we reconcile this with the duty, or the physical impossibility, of not keeping one's mouth shut? Kierkegaard reached an incredible conclusion: one must humiliate oneself to the uttermost to the point even of falling below the one that is deceived, lavish thoughtful attentions upon him, obtain forgiveness from him for the truth that is in me. For what does a nurse do, doesn't she become a slave to the sick one so that she can remove his sickness, therefore paying her tribute of gratitude to God for her own good health?

To comply with this arduous plan, Kierkegaard adopted the strange deportment of defaming and discrediting himself. He had to tell his neighbours and brothers that they were being bad Christians, and in what ways: "you'll find nothing more corrupted than the priests", and he began by denying that he himself was a Christian; and started to call himself a walking sinner and a corrupted one at that: he was a priest.

In Christ's case this won't do. But Christ annihilated himself before the Pharisees, complying with all their precepts and laws to an impossible degree,

answering all their questions and objections, resorting to countless parables, arguments and explanations in the face of people who in bad faith questioned him, and that, in some cases, didn't even have the right to do so; and even if they legally appeared to have such rights, they were only apparent. And to all appearances he made Himself a sinner. Sure. He let himself be seen with sinners and publicans ("hunt with cats and you catch only rats") and did not indignantly look daggers at female sinners. It would've been so easy and politically correct! In any case, what? Couldn't he thunder, once at least, like all preachers do, against all sinners, against the undermining of morals and good customs, rampant corruption, the filth of the flesh, and those shorter and shorter bathing suits coming out from Greece? No, not one word about "the beaches"! Only luminous parables, poetic comparisons and general rules, namely poetry, poetry and more poetry! Where is this leading?

Apparently Christ didn't see impurity; maybe out of sheer purity. He never indulged himself in calling a carnal sinner a pig. When he had to speak to one, he bowed his head and kept quiet.

So, the solution is that one has to seek martyrdom going about one's business and being what one really is in eternity. This is to say: "Don't tell any lies; don't say any truth if there is no need." The difficulty lies in establishing when a truth is necessary. "Non tacebo." (I will not shut up), wrote Campanella the madman in his cell; and, in fact, his lot was to indwell it for no less than 26 years, a man's life; and the odd thing was that he was being punished for having plotted against the Spanish government, and the Neapolitan Dominican was a furious Hispanophile and a member of the imperial party; Non tacebo. A truth is necessary when it'll save a soul—and sometimes to bring home the bacon; all the more if both things are called for. For instance, if I'm going to earn my daily bread by writing poetry (God forbid, don't say that, not even as a joke), well, then I must write the most artistic possible poems and aspire to attain the highest poetic beauty; which is no other than the truth; for a very well versed poet told me that every time he couldn't come up with a good line, when he finally did it became clear that what had happened was that the

faulty verse hadn't truth in it; or not sufficient truth, as he put it.

There's no risk of overdoing my poetry like Shakespeare sometimes does, cluttering his lines bewilderingly to a noisome point; but if by putting sufficient truth in a poem I get into hot water and am imprisoned by the communists, or if I get a ticket from the Cardinal Primate, it's all tickety-boo since I've only done my duty.

But on the next day I'd get another job, unless it's one of those (heaven forbid) jobs that one cannot jettison, like being a freemason, a spouse, a priest or a journalist.

And that's what happened to Kierkegaard; and through him we can infer what happened to Jesus Christ. They were atrociously frank. If they had a tongue, they just had to speak up ("credidi, propter quod loquutus sum"), and if they spoke out they had to say, not only one thing true, but the very truth; this is to say what in a concrete and specific case from the bottom of my heart I cannot but see, things that through all my senses I see, live and drink.

*

The sociology of Pharisaism

Let's be done with Theology and try for a moment to see from a bit closer, à la Augustus Comte, what actually was going on in this society of the "separated" (Pherushim or phjerishajja, from where Pharisees).

We've already said what happened; but the casuistry, the bigoted ritualism, the political Messianism and the politics itself are no more than symptoms or the expression of these people's ghoulish leanings if you will. What made it possible?

It was a society that socialized itself: this is to say, that closed ranks around itself.

From a religious point of view when this happens to a society it becomes a closed sect: it can maintain itself entirely orthodox and claim to be perfectly faithful to the head of the Church, but it's not "Catholic" anymore. Its bonds with the head are purely external.

When an organism begins to gravitate "insidewards"... that is called cancer.

It's a bad sign for a social body when "unity" is it's main worry to the detriment of "purpose" (Oh my God! I've just been listening to a man raving endlessly about the need for a greater "unity among Spaniards". What rubbish! I mean, unity, unity... for what? Say for what in the first place...)

It's a dreadful symptom when any body begins to reflect too much about itself, especially if that concern shadows the real object of that society in particular, it's very *raison d'être*: which is exactly what happens to sick people, as Saint Thomas Aquinas observed. "The end of any thing whatsoever cannot be its own preservation."

In self-defense

*And then,
Don't they say
That he's a bad fellow,
Just because he fights back?*

(José Hernández, Martín Fierro)

All things considered, Christ's anti-Pharisaic campaign, much as it seems an aggressive one, was in self-defense. The racket he kicked up in the Temple with which he began his struggle is in fact an allegation of his Messianic mission; and his terrible speech on the "Woes of the Pharisees" with which he rounded it off represents a supreme effort to save his life, already condemned, using the most strong weapons: the curse and prophetic threat.

The driving of the traders from the Temple is something quite surprising; as baffling, let us say, as when he stayed there, years before, without informing his parents—if one disregards what Christ was.

Two distinct Messianic statements destroy Renan's well known theory, namely that Christ would've been a Galilean peasant and a lofty moralist that started to preach the interior and universal religion of Moses against the external and distorted religion of the parochial Pharisees; and that with his string of successes he became more and more enthusiastic; that he conceived the idea that the world would soon come to its end; that he identified himself with the Messianic King and that finally, after his triumph on Palm Sunday, he pronounced exalted words by which he assimilated himself to God himself, of all things; mystical expressions that the authorities did themselves no favour in taking at face value; but that according to the Jewish laws deserved capital punishment.

This is pure fantasy. The truth is that from the very beginning, all of Christ's deeds were imprinted with the Messianic stamp. Before starting off a great campaign the Hebrews used to fast for forty days, and this was a well known

fact as showed in Moses and Elijah's precedents.

Incidentally, Riccioti greatly errs when he considers the fast a miraculous feat, an inexplicable and supernatural one; saying that "the fasting is evidently presented by the Evangelists as an absolute supernatural deed"; and then deeming the fact that after those forty days he felt hunger, an extraordinary one. That fasting is within the reach of any human organism, and the fact that hunger disappears after the first three or four days of absolute diet and that it reappears with special force around the 40th day (which is the life span of a red corpuscle), is what usually happens.

We refer to a complete fast in which one drinks water: the Evangelists don't say that Jesus didn't drink. This fasting is very well known in Eastern countries, albeit as a therapeutic practice; and we know of several people who have practised it without inconvenient and to their advantage. In Christ's times it had religious significance, namely the preparation for a great mission. It's certainly not as easy as blowing and making bottles, but it isn't a miracle either—unless it's without drinking water. In that case we believe it to be biologically impossible, one couldn't go on for forty days without water unless it were a miracle.

So the fasting and subsequent temptations are Messianic in themselves. The miracle at Cana, which seems to be a kind deference to his friends, concludes saying that "his disciples believed on Him", meaning the disciples that the Baptist had sent over, Peter and Andrew, John and his brother. The baptism and testimony of John are nothing else than a solemn consecration of Christ's Messiahship. And the new prophet's first public action had all the trappings of an act of authority which must of felt like the roar of a bomb explosion.

The rejection of the Messiah modestly born in Galilee had already begun with his forerunner and first disciple, John the Baptist. The Pharisees hadn't recognized the new prophet and opposed him as one can easily gather from the violent imprecations and threats he dedicated to them, evidently after the "examination" that John the Gospel Writer evokes, an occasion in which, conversely, the Baptist answered with due modesty and respect. In that

inquiry the Pharisees learnt that the Baptist, by his own confession, was not the Messiah, wasn't Elijah and that his authority proceeded from someone much greater than himself, someone who was to show up, who was already among them, and whom they knew not. All three Synoptic Gospels refer the same thing: "They didn't believe him" (Math. XXI:23-27; Mark XI:27-33; Luke XX:1-8).

Very probably, as the Gospels seem to show, this "confession" set the Pharisees against John and it's then and there that they began to fight him by undermining his authority; and through him, attack his "Better" the One on whom he rested. One mustn't forget that in those times the lodge was in possession of all the necessary religious information: the Doctors of the Law held the key of the organized and efficient network of preachers reaching to all of Judea, just like our modern parishes. In view of the results of the official comission's "examination" and when to all intent and purposes matters were coming to a head, however they didn't follow suit, a Pharisee tactic they repeated now and again: they could present John as a heretic and a lunatic of sorts; which is, to all intent and purposes, what they did, given that they immediately did the same thing with Christ as the Gospel clearly records. "You're nuts. You have a devil. You contradict the law of Moses." As we have said, the Pharisees held the keys to all religious information, all the "ecclesiastic bulletins" were at their disposal, so to say.

On the face of it, one could think that Christ defended himself violently, but on second thoughts Christ's gentleness is stunning; naturally, it's the case of a king defending himself from an usurper: and for all his meekness he is not their inferior.

They could have seized him at the Atrium, a single man armed with only a belt, against a crowd; and the fact that they didn't only shows that they had a guilty conscience (and the weakness that naturally follows), something felt not only by the merchants themselves, but by the guardian priests and vergers of the Temple also. So they limit themselves to question him.

To their questions, Jesus answered by claiming a special relationship with God

and that specific house ("my Father's house"); and when they demanded a miracle he didn't deny that he could do them: nay, he declared that he could realize a wonderful prodigy, a greater one that they couldn't even imagine: shocking.

The show of indignation and authority, a sort of parable in deeds, does not repeat itself until the end of Christ's campaign, if the fracas that the Synoptics relate at the end (Math XXI:12-17; Mark XI:15-19; Luke XIX:45-48) isn't the same one John, who's more careful about chronology, tells us about at the beginning of his Gospel (II:12-22), as some say. It amounts to the same thing. The Jews understood him all right. And the Pharisees' reaction is a perfect confirmation of the Messianic declaration "but when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet" (Math XXI:46).

The rest of Christ's defense is a verbal one blended with his mission as a Teacher, Reformer and Prophet. With these vacuous doctors, it's a constant argument.

It includes the denunciation of the pharisaic casuistry as vane, inane and perverse; establishing that man would not obtain salvation by belonging to any one nation, race, sect, congregation or group in particular, nor by possessing the true doctrine, not even by doing miracles, but only through love of God and neighbour with justice as its foundation, and mercy as its flower; by completing merely external precepts with the introduction of holiness and inward sanctity; he warned his disciples against the widespread pharisaic spirit, that he called "yeast"; and told them to undo their stratagems and triumphantly brave their questioning; he gradually depicted Pharisaism with worse and worse traits; and lastly he resorted to curse and divine threats, in the ancient prophet's manner. Naturally, one has to believe that the struggle could not but increase as the persecution escalated and murder was felt imminent; and that the terrible woes from Mathew XXIII represent the last stage in this long fight, pronounced when the murderous intentions were all too evident and known as a fact to all and sundry. "Isn't this the man they

wanted to kill? And how come he's preaching unhindered in the Temple?"

The discussion with the Pharisees suffuses and frames all Christ's preaching, in its time a highly topical and dramatic subject. The Hebrews loved improvised musical dialogues, just like our peasants, and all primitive people in general: people like to be instructed and learn by listening to the pros and cons of a thesis debated by experts. And in fact, it's the most natural and efficient way of convincing, a combination of instruction, fight and play. It's as interesting as football.

The discussion with the doctors gave Christ the chance to brilliantly unfold his teachings: even the parables with which he describes, defines and bases his kingdom, are pointedly aimed at the pharisaic idea of a false Messianic kingdom. His answers to subtle, muddled or cunning questions, that now we find simple, so many times have we heard them, are brilliant. It all reminds us of the dangerous questioning of Joan of Arc.

Sometimes he dodges a question answering back with a question of his own; just like the Galician peasants; other times he answers with a parable or an antithesis, a metaphore, or some other unexpected sentence; when there is good faith he speaks straightly; for instance, when the Scribe who had asked which was the greatest commandment and having given witness "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; truly the love of God and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices", he is rewarded with this invitation: "Thou are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark XII:34).

The typical example of a dodged question is that narrated by the three synoptics when they deal with the last days of his preaching, in the Temple, and not in the presence of one doctor only but before lots of them assembled, plus all the people. They ask him practically in an official capacity—"the princes of the priests", or prelates as it were, the scribes, which is to say the theologians, the ancients of the people or magistrates all rolled into one: "Tell us by what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?" (Math XXI:23).

He had told them already a hundred times. The question was directed to make him publicly confess that he hadn't their permission to preach, or else to refute him in front of everyone.

He answered back saying: "I'll ask you something too, and if you answer, then I shall tell you with what power I act. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? Answer me." (Math XXI:25).

All things considered, this question includes the answer to the other one: I do this by the authority vested in me by God Himself as John the Baptist has resolutely testified. His question traced the matter to its sources, it wasn't a subterfuge only.

And that is how they saw it. "If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet."

They hastily retreated: "We don't know."

It was their duty to know. They didn't want to say it. That's why Jesus doesn't answer them as they expected by saying something like "Neither do I know what you ask me about", but instead: "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things"—even if in fact he had answered them in the refined style of Semitic counterpoints. Undoubtedly the crowd must have endorsed him with a murmur of approval.

Another example of the other two ways of answering, the direct and the parabolic, is found in the most beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan.

The preaching is already full-blown, the 72 disciples have come back, Christ has traveled all over Judea, he's on everyone's lips. A Doctor of the Law approaches him and questions him simply: "Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Math. XIX:16). This one must have belonged to the seventh class of Pharisees such as the Talmud classifies them, a "Pharisee from fear", in other words, a truly religious man. The other six classes were disastrous: "Pharisee for the money", "bigoted Pharisee", "uncouth Pharisee", "inconsistent Pharisee", "lame Pharisee" and the "kizai

Pharisee", a calculator so to say. That's how the Talmud classifies them.

So Christ answers him with the same simplicity: "You are a Doctor, what does the Law say?"

He replies with words from both the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus combined—perhaps he knew how Christ himself had once pronounced himself on that matter: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."

Jesus approved and quoted the Leviticus in turn: "You have well said. This do and thou shalt live."

But the other one wanted to make it clear that he was addressing a real difficulty and not pointing to a well known reference; connected to a hotly debated question by the casuistry of the times, one muddled by national pride: exactly who is "my neighbour" for an Israelite. Perchance do the idolatrous, the samaritans, the arrogant and oppressive Romans, also belong in that category?

"And who exactly is my neighbour?"

Jesus seized the chance and adopted the nabi-him's attitude and began to improvise in oral style for everyone's benefit, one of his "rythmic recitations", comparable to "The romance of the Cid" or to our "payadas" * if you will:

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,

when he was attacked by robbers.

They stripped him of his clothes,

beat him and went away,

leaving him half dead.

A priest happened to be going down the same road,

and when he saw the man,

he passed by on the other side.

So too, a Levite,

when he came to the place and saw him,
passed by on the other side.
But a Samaritan,
as he traveled,
came where the man was;
and when he saw him, he took pity on him.
He went to him and bandaged his wounds,
pouring on oil and wine.
Then he put the man on his own donkey,
brought him to an inn and took care of him.
The next day he took out two denarii
and gave them to the innkeeper.
'Look after him,' he said,
'and when I return,
I will reimburse you..."

The tale is crystal clear; and maybe something that had really happened. On the one hand, the 37 kilometer road between Jerusalem and Jericho was a busy one, but on the other, it passed through some rather tricky woods where gangs of thieves were known to abide, specially at the point the Jews used to call "The little bloody turn". Christ might have heard about the incident when passing through Jericho around those days. It is well known that the greater poets are less prone to make things up, even if they rephrase everything that gets to their ears. It is quite certain that the people would have said: "This is true. Things happened exactly like that." After this, the narrator turned to the theologian and asked him: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." And Jesus said to him: "Go and do likewise" (Luke X:25-37), in the same vein as the previous epilogue: "This do and thou shalt live," this time declaring it under his own authority. The parable was striking (A Priest! A Levite! A Samaritan! Assaulted and stabbed!) and highly

anti-Pharisaic not only because of the daring denunciation of the liturgical castes' heartlessness but above all in proclaiming the principle of "proximity" of all human being in need, never mind the caste to which he may belong. In the end mercy is what regulates the proximity between men and not frontiers or social ranks—for a certain deep compassion or "sympathy" substantiates true love in such a way that in certain circumstances I may find myself under the grave duty of doing a father's or brother's part to a complete stranger if he's very much in need and no one more obliged than myself is in sight; according to Saint Augustine: "If you could have saved him and you didn't, you have killed him". *Si reliquisti dum servare potuisti, illum occidisti.*

*

Woes of the Pharisees

(Math XXII)

*Woe unto you, scribes
and Pharisees, hypocrites!*

Not all the Pharisees had Pharisaism; some of that faction or sect or religious congregation hadn't been contaminated and perhaps were even saintly. Some of them were disciples of Christ. Saul was no hypocrite but on the contrary, bigoted, before he became Paul.

The very word Pharisee adopted a pejorative significance after Christ, just like the word Sophist after Plato. The Sophists were somewhat like our modern "lecturers", like García Sánchiz or Pemán.

The "separated ones", the Pherishajja, which is what "pharisee" means, included men like wise Hillel who formulated the Golden Rule, namely that one should not treat others in ways that one would not like to be treated, Gamaliel the Elder, Saint Paul's teacher; Simon, Christ's friend; Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and a number of converts to Christianity with whom Saint Paul would argue later: "Are they Pharisees? So am I!"

The Pharisees were "separated" from the Sadducees; because the latter maintained that the Revelation was only to be found in the written Law or Torah, like the Protestants; while the Pharisees added Tradition to the Books. We know from Christ's lips what they did with that oral tradition (which in itself was perfectly justified).

The history of the Pharisees has been clearly recorded by Flavius Josephus many times.

Descendants of the Assideans or "Hasidim", the legatees of the national-religious theme of Mathathias Maccabee, they later became the "Zealots" or nationalists and the "hit men", something like the Irish Sinn-Féin, so to speak. The Pharisees acquired such consistency that they may be compared to a

modern religious congregation, and they exerted such an influence that they considered themselves (quite reasonably) higher up than the priests and the kings: their force stemmed from their knowledge of the Law; that among Theocratic people had the maximum value. Accordingly Christ puts them in the same basket with the "scribes" who were learned people despite the fact that a Pharisee might not be a "doctor" but only an observant and rigorous person, what these days we would say a prudish person.

That's why Christ didn't incriminate them all in his terrible sermon from Mathew's Chapter XXIII, but added the adjective "hypocrite", that must be understood more like a restrictive relative clause and not so much as a qualifying expression. However, in Christ's time the faction as a whole was reprehensible; and its false puritanical and sanctimonious spirit had already been formulated, written and turned into constitutions and rules of which Christ quoted two: "Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever, thou mightest be profited by me; And honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free" (Math XV:6). In the Talmud you will find dozens of casuistic and legally codified rules of the sort. For instance:

"The words of the Scribes have more value than the words of the Torah."

"The words of the Law include light and serious precepts; but the words of a Scribe are always serious."

"The study of the Torah is more important than the construction of the Temple."

"To study the Torah is greater than to honour father and mother."

"The Law is a higher thing than the priesthood and the royalty."

"The rabble that ignores the Torah is accursed."

"The countrified peasants are not pious and not one rustic fears sin."

"It is a deadly thing to be with the rabble."

"It is allowed to punch anyone of the rabble, even on Saturdays, nay, even on the Saturday of Kippur."

There is no such thing as a society evil to the point that it doesn't include something good in it, nor one so good that it hasn't anyone or anything bad in

it; and the same may be said of teachings... Nevertheless it's not impossible, though sometimes something of a tall order, to pass a moral judgment about any society, as long as the judgment is based on "the group that sets the trend". Or, as the Schools have it, the "formal" part, that sometimes can be a minority.

An army of Lyons commanded by a bunch of dimwits (As Napoleon said, referring to the Spanish army) is an army of asses; that can, however, give Napoleon the First a good kicking.

Just because a society is governed by bad men is not enough to make it an evil one. Sometimes it's worse when governed by a fool. The Church wasn't in a bad state during Alexander VI's pontificate; not imitating him and resisting where possible would do, would be enough. Some saints saved the Church's honour in those circumstances; the King of France, the Spanish bishops, many discontented Italians and poor Savonarola.

But in Christ's times the "minority that sets the trend" was, among the Pharisees, entirely Pharisaical. Accordingly, at the end of his public life, Christ directly attacks the whole sect, after having tirelessly struggled against its religious distortion and bigoted nationalism with explanations, corrections, arguments and, above all, example. Finally he had to resort to the terrible vocabulary of his Forerunner and to the language of all the prophets with their prophetic threats. He knew what he was doing and what he was exposing himself to, and by now he had predicted his death to his disciples.

Then spake Jesus to the multitude,

and to his disciples, saying:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do;

but do not ye after their works:

for they say, and do not.

For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne,

and lay them on men's shoulders;

but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

But all their works they do for to be seen of men:

they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

and love the uppermost rooms at feasts,

and the chief seats in the synagogues,

and greetings in the markets,

and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

But be not ye called Rabbi:

for one is your Master, even Christ;

and all ye are brethren.

And call no man your father upon the earth:

for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

Neither be ye called masters:

for one is your Master, even Christ.

But he that is greatest among you

shall be your servant.

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased;

and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men:

for ye neither go in yourselves,

neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

Woe unto you!

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

for ye devour widows' houses,

and for a pretense make long prayer:

therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

Woe unto you!

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte;
and when he is made, ye make him
twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

Woe unto you!

Woe unto you, ye blind guides!

which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing;
but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

Ye fools and blind:

for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing;
but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

Ye fools and blind!

for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar,
sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it,
and by him that dwelleth therein.

And he that shall swear by heaven,
sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin,
and have omitted the weightier matters
of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith:
these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter,
but within they are full of extortion and excess.

Thou blind Pharisee,

cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter,
that the outside of them may be clean also.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

for ye are like unto whited sepulchres,
which indeed appear beautiful outward,
but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men,
but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

because ye build the tombs of the prophets,
and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,
and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers,
we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves,
that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers!

how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets,
and wise men, and scribes:

and some of them ye shall kill and crucify;
and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues,
and persecute them from city to city:

that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth,
from the blood of righteous Abel

unto the blood of Zechari'ah son of Berechi'ah,
whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Verily I say unto you,

All these things shall come upon this generation.

Only Christ, the last and greatest of all the prophets, could pronounce this imprecation and menace them like that. The immediate fate of Jerusalem was before his eyes. So was his own. Christ adds the final prophecy:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!,
who kills the prophets
and stones to death those who have been sent to her!
How often I wanted to gather your children together
as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings,
but you people were unwilling!

The moral portrait of the Pharisees is staggering. It is eternal and cannot be improved. It's the echo—now vested with the maximum authority of poetry, science and the prophetic mission—of an acerbic imprecation directed against the congregation of the Pharisees, pronounced by one of their own some 20 years before and that had been recorded in "The Assumption of Moses", that judaic apokalypse of theirs.

Jesus Christ felt the poison of these people, and by comparison the sensual and unfaithful Saducees almost seem to have been pardoned in his preaching, disdained. Let us not forget that it is to them that he refers to when he talks about "the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost that shall not be forgiven unto men" (Math XII:31), the most terrifying words ever uttered by a human mouth. For the rest, he plainly stated that they were the sons of the devil and that the devil was their father.

The father of liar

Who was a murderer from the beginning.

How come that this horror could proceed from these people, these abiding, zealous people, dedicated to the study of the Law... it is a difficult thing to specify, but not impossible to conceive. For a start, "casuistry" made its appearance. All complete codes postulate a certain casuistry, the exercise by

which you apply general precepts to particular cases. There's nothing wrong with that, quite the contrary. But casuistry easily degenerates by excess or by distortion: it becomes too tangled, it cuts loose from the law and its spirit, it hollows out and then the devil gets in, an easy thing for him considering that he's "the spirit of emptiness" and likes, in the same way that bedbugs do, empty trunks. In these "cracked cisterns, that can hold no water" as Jeremiah called the Pharisees of his day (II:13), all sorts of weirdos find refuge. In the Pharisaic casuistry, the Talmud, the commentaries of the Law, the tradition of the doctors, one can find here and there some fruit amid the waffle, as in fact it includes collected "sayings" from the prophets and the doctors; but the padding had grown to immense proportions and had contaminated all the rest: "commandments of men" (Tit I:14), "who legislate about the mint and the rue" as Jesus blame them of doing (Luke XI:42); and "nests" and "vases" and "the stems of fruits" and who pass laws endlessly regulating the Saturday rest day, on the payment of the tithe and ritual purity: if a priest could celebrate or not after having inadvertently touched a woman's shadow, if a tithe could be exacted from the son of the son of the son of a debtor, if it was permissible to eat on Saturdays from a fruit fallen from a tree. But the fact is that those who are capable of keeping these long-winded and subtle "observances" usually are childish and neurotic characters; and God forbid that things arrive to the unfortunate point in which "regular observance" substitutes holiness in a religious community. In that case, anything follows.

"Between one that does not know the Torah and an ass, the ass is better because he doesn't speak." One can imagine this sort of thing by entering a decadent convent's library: loads of handbooks, books of useless devotions, collections of sermons made out of other sermons if not inspired by one of those vacuous and, worse still, noisy cowbell-like commentaries to the Canonical Law Code, tons of hefty volumes of moral and pastoral theology, the works of Saint John of the Cross, of Ricardo León, of Father Coloma and Father Van Tricht under lock and key in the "Light literature" section, incomplete Bibles with littered lives of saints and historic studies of the Founder, a

godforsaken jumble covered with dust. Sometimes one can study the stages of decay in a library, just as you do with the ages of the earth by observing its various geological strata. "From 1899 to 1905 a clever superior was in charge over here," a shrewd librarian once said to me, "and then it was over." "Do they actually teach philosophy over here?" he later said, "for we cannot find a single set of complete works by any philosopher; only handbooks and books of rebuttals."

Into this emptiness of the Pharisaical casuistry, religious conceit was the first to get in; afterwards the idea of a political Messiah made its way, and finally pride settled in, the mother of untruthfulness and cruelty.

The only ones who could keep all the law were those who knew it; and to know it completely took a lifetime: but that was the best thing in the world. "The Torah is greater than priesthood and royalty, because priesthood has 24 requirements, royalty 30; but you only reach the Torah after 48." The priests were overwhelmed by an ever more complex ritual and had abandoned the study of the Law to the laity, becoming, in the main, liturgical professionals, in other words, keen sellers of magic ceremonies. These were good business for this life, but the Torah gave science, wisdom, holiness and eternal salvation. With good reason the Pharisee prayed: "I thank thee, for I am not as other men are... as this publican." (Luke XVIII:11). Because "the pagan that approaches the study of the Torah should be put to death."

One gathers that religious conceit gave way to political Messiahship. The Pharisees needed to avenge their scorching humiliations, retaliate on account of their tumbles and defeats. They felt religion humiliated and a Messiah would surely vindicate religion. And if the Messiah was to be a politician, they had to prepare for his coming by delving into politics, naturally. One hundred years before Christ, the Pharisees waged war against King Alexandre Jannaeus, a six year affair that cost 50,000 victims; during the following reign of Queen Salome Alexandra they were the true rulers, if Josephus is to be believed. The Sadducees were pitilessly dominated. They sought refuge among the great priestly families, flattering the powerful. The Pharisees counted with some

popularity, above all among pious women, and constituted a numerous, fearsome and meddling tribe.

When religion lets politics in, a strange corruption takes place. In such circumstances power becomes a fearsome thing, for it can constrain consciences. With a religious injunction Caiphas forced Christ to "blaspheme" in such a way that it cost him his life, to wit: that he was "the Son of Man" to which Daniel had referred. Corruption reaches its highest degree when religion is reduced to a mere instrument and becomes a pretext for political purposes. "You love the chief seats in the synagogues... and love greetings in the markets" (Luke XX:46)—Christ imprecated them. Before cruelty makes its appearance, one must begin by being hard-hearted. But even before that, one must be religiously conceited. It is cruel enough to go around "devouring widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers" (Mark, XII:40); but the cruelty of the Pharisees that showed up in Christ's Passion usually played out by banishing or killing their enemies, though almost always through secret cunning stratagems. They didn't want to jeopardize the title of "Most Sage and Holy Doctor" which was how they expected to be addressed. Christ cancelled that in one whack when he said: "There is none good but one, that is, God. Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ."

The politics of the Pharisees immediately becomes evident. At the beginning of his second year of preaching, when his first trip to Jerusalem (as Mathew, Mark and Luke unanimously record) "the Pharisees and the Herodians took counsel against him, how they might destroy him". To eliminate him was a settled question, but not how. Weren't the Pharisees and Herodians enemies? So they were, but then, only political enemies, the sort that readily agree when a nonpolitical opponent appears, the kind that upsets the two-party system, one of those who disturb the "free play of the democratic institutions" like they say nowadays. The agreement was quite successful: to eliminate him in such a manner that they themselves wouldn't look bad, concurrently avoiding popular commotion; and those in charge of executing the plan were

the most religious, naturally: the Pharisees.

So there they were, partying and making great speeches, flattering and sweet-talking to each other, exciting everybody in defense of religion against the Saducee ungodliness which amounted to defend the Pharisees themselves: withdrawn men, hard-hearted, ruthless, narrow-minded, hostile to life and beauty; prying all over the place, prideful people, resentful, starry-eyed, grovelling, shrewd, devious, grim; ostentatious, obtuse, cheeky, conceited, bumptious, godforsaken people, feared by men as the Gospel shows; leading a whole nation to a complete catastrophe, their people doomed to fall with them owing to that mysterious social solidarity that makes nations have bad leaders only when such a thing is possible. The peasants of Galilee and the fishermen and the simple artisans were like "sheep without a shepherd"; but the people of the cities and those that determined the social trends had evil shepherds, wolves in sheep's clothing, that went around intoxicating them with lofty verbosity centred on a flattering but entirely false ideal.

Only stagnant waters rots and stinks; maggots only thrive on a dead corpse.

*

With what authority?

*To say certain truths
is a sin in itself.*

(José Hernández, Martín Fierro)

The Gospels do not outrightly tell us about the inception and reasons behind the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. They just show Jesus struggling with the lodge from the very beginning. What is more, the cleansing of the Temple creates the impression that Christ is the aggressor. Saint John puts it at the beginning of his Gospel and the Synoptics at the end. When one studies the Gospels closely it appears that the incident repeated itself with a three year gap in between, or else that this deed of absolute and violent authority took place when the Messiah was beginning his public life, after John's testimony and the miracle at Cana.

It looks like a provocation.

Wasn't Jesus supposed to preach and act in accordance with the religious authorities of Israel and with their consent? That's what nowadays is done in the Church. And even supposing that his supreme Messianic authority, sealed already by the miracle at Cana, did not depend on Caiaphas' legal authority, wouldn't it have been advisable and more polite to obtain the religious chiefs' placet or at least give it a try?

A Pharisee could have well said: "What? Is it the case today that anyone can preach the law of Moses as he pleases?; may anyone stir up religious movements among the people and exert an act of authority in the Temple without the consent of the priests or legal directors of our religion? Without the approval of the Doctors who have spent their life studying the Law?"

But they did not say so; and that alone answers this difficulty. They didn't say so. When the energetic young man armed with a whip burst into the Temple they asked for a sign, in other words, a miracle. Which means that they were

perfectly aware of Christ's answer were they to question him: "I've a direct mission from God", something that in Judaic theology required a confirmation by miracles.

But when they request a miracle "ad hoc", Christ, all through his life, constantly answers in the negative; in this case with a conditional negative that includes a promise and a warning. It contains the promise of a miracle, then a mysterious one, which is his own resurrection; and a forewarning even more distant in time, mentioning the destruction of the Temple, which the Pharisees held as a perfectly indestructible fetish. To Jewish ears this answer resonated like a thunderclap. The destruction of the Temple! Raise it up in three days! What a way of speaking!

The answer itself was obscure and brilliant, "pregnant". "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," means lots of things. I have the power to make miracles and will do so when convenient. This Temple can be destroyed and as it happens you yourselves are destroying it by outrageously converting it into a marketplace. I have received direct authority from God, my Father... When at his trial they reproached him for having said this they took good care to slightly alter it: "This one has said: I shall destroy the Temple..." when in fact what he had said was: "Destroy this Temple..." or more precisely, "Continue to destroy it and..." which in good grammar is what the imperative aorist of the verb "lyo" means. This shows that they perfectly understood the charge of devastating religion, symbolized by the Temple, contained in the cryptic and unexpected answer.

Christ would have acted equivocally and would have shown himself to be dishonest had he requested permission to preach to Caiaphas; something equivalent to challenging his own authority. In other words, he would have lied, showing that he was not the Messiah, making his supreme authority depend on another legal authority and subordinating himself to it. All the more after John the Baptist's public testimony, to which at first he implicitly referred, and later, explicitly evoked.

The Pharisees knew perfectly well that this testimony qualified Christ's claim to

authority. John the Prophet had undeniably singled him out as the one who had been Secularly Waited For. Christ had accepted the testimony and had begun to act in consequence. A certain supernatural decency and divine modesty shines in the course of this mysterious beginning of campaign.

Conversely, with John the Pharisees indeed proceeded with what was obviously called for and set up an inquest to find out with what authority he preached and baptized. Not that in those days preaching required regular "licenses" as is now the case, for any Israelite was free to exhort his brothers, could go about the towns as a traveling preacher of the Law and its commentaries and improvise on his own authority what today we would call sermons, recitations in oral style—that are not at all like our sermons—and finally, interpret the Prophets for the people that assembled every Saturday at the Synagogues. No. That was a perfectly normal pursuit, free from restrictions of any kind, a simple intellectual exercise, comparable if you will with our poets and philosophers.

But John had violently denounced and rebuked the religious abuses of his day. To whom was he referring when he spoke of a "generation of vipers that would not be able to flee from the wrath to come"? And what could possibly be that "axe laid unto the root of the trees"? The allusion to the Pharisees and the Messianic reference were unmistakable. Besides, John received the confession of sins and baptized, as yet formless rites which simply symbolized the "metanoia", the change of heart that made possible God's pardon and predisposed men to welcome the Great New Words.

And so they question the abrasive prophet from Makeron trying to establish if he is the Messiah, or else Elijah that was to precede him, or perhaps another prophet. No. All right then, with what authority? His authority is a reflection. His authority proceeds from the Supreme Authority of someone else to come immediately after himself, whom he shall recognize by a miraculous sign that has been revealed to him, after which, he will indicate him for everyone to see; and having done so, he finds it suitable to "decrease so the Other one increases", to disappear following the walks of martyrdom once his mission is

accomplished.

Oh the bloody head on a silver plate delivered to the danseuse! The diademed debased gaffer is the responsible for his death and the reason for it was because of a public reproach prompted by his scandalous union with his sister-in-law. But who were the tattlers that went to him with the gossip and spurred him on encouraging the cowardly man—a puppet king, flabby and superstitious? That's not difficult to guess. The Pharisees were not liable to pardon or to forget the thunderous denunciation of this race of vipers that abused religion and had lost all fear of God's Judgement. "These people proceed as if God does not exist", said John of the Cross in his time.

So even as Christ begins his mission with the sweetest of miracles he's already under rancorous, spiteful and murderous eyes. At this point these sanctimonious people consider him as no more than a rejoinder and a successor to the other hated demagogue, if anything a more daring and wriggly one, one gifted with more attractive methods of seduction. Not by any stretch of the imagination were they going to comply with their strictly religious and professional duty, namely, to present themselves at the scene recognize the miracle and humbly ask the thaumaturge who was he and what were they expected to do: exactly what the poor people did with John, moved only by his penitence and preaching, by the magnetic personality and appearance of one who could not but be a prophet. Quite on the contrary, what immediately follows is the accusation of "heretic": he teaches to infringe the Sabbath, something clearly against the Law of Moses. No one presses charges on account of what happened at the Temple, never mind the violence and uproar prompted by the circumstances. Naturally: the scene was edifying for the people, and they themselves had bad consciences because of this business of the rabble that trafficked in merchandise dishonouring the Atrium. But the other accusation was more specious. Christ quietly ignored the Pharisees' ridiculous casuistry referred to the Sabbath: they had conflated their idle discussions and oral traditions with the inspired and written Torah to the point that that thick foliage, the tiresome and dried up case-by-case

morality, not only had identified itself with the trunk, but had all but obliterated it. "Do you not lay hold of a sheep and lift it out of a pit on the Sabbath day?" And to cure a woman with a word or without any words amounted to work on the Sabbath.

Wherever you find regulations in excess, a proliferation of mandates, rules, mores, explanatory notes, rigid formalities and so on, there's not only the danger of forgetting the spirit and end of the law—it is in itself the sign that the spirit has given in. And so three possible things easily happen: the fool may appear to be an expert, the hypocrite looks like a saint and an innocent person may end up condemned. With good reason Martín Fierro distrusts the law—in other words the "proceedings"—as soon as a world of pettifogging lawyers substitute the patriarchal and personal way of doing justice (like Juan Manuel de Rosas' did in his time): behind the Proceedings he can hazard dark intentions moving against him that will send him to prison in no time, along with his men and son.

Since the very moment that Christ is judged to be a heretic he is doomed. Afterwards, by and by, and as the envy and fury increases before his achievements, a succession of invectives will be thrown at him: madman, magician, possessed by the devil; and later on: blasphemer, seditious and finally conspirator against Caesar. Everything goes. It is an accusation that grows on its own as time goes by without no one demanding the guilty party for explanations in his defense; on the contrary each explanation will only be turned into another accusation. The proceedings are secret. When the judges appear in public it is not an accusation anymore, but a sentence. They assert slanderously and try to catch out the convicted person in one or another unfortunate turn of words to make the mud stick.

One witnesses the slow fermentation of the slander in the people, now and then repealed and stopped in its tracks by the defendant's brilliant blows; and the development of two parties. But the conflict's real linchpin, "This man cannot be the Messiah because he doesn't look like the Messiah we expect", is never discussed: because the ambitious cannot reveal where his feuds lie deep

within; which would amount to openly expose his ambitions. Neither could Christ do it directly, except by his deeds; however he never ceases to tell them that if they do not recognize him it's because the Father hadn't delivered them to him, because their pride had blinded them to the light and shut off the prophecies; to the point that it was useless to argue with them. In fact, if a man were to raise from the dead with the deliberate intention of testifying to the truth, they wouldn't believe him.

All things considered, we are against a real religious authority that resists a higher religious authority; in this case, the supreme one, undeniable and overwhelming; so the expression "resisted the Holy Ghost" is not exaggerated. The clash between priests and prophets was not unknown in the Old Testament, for instance the prophets Hosea and Malachias record such incidents; and we know from Christ's own lips that these fights sometimes culminated with the prophet's murder. With good reason Saint Paul recommends that those gifted with "charisma" must respect one another and learn to get along; but only charity and true humility are capable of achieving such a thing. If those gifted with the charisma of the "shepherd", to wit, directors and organizers, come to believe that they see it all, that they know all things and are capable of anything... well, that will induce them to hate the Prophet, which is by definition the man who sees, the seer. And so, they become dim-sighted and finally "blind leaders of the blind". That is why, one will say:

Do not kill the prophets,

You, priests: their charismas do not deny.

They hold the drumsticks,

And see things, and call them by their name.

May God protect us from asses and their kicks

And from men that believe themselves to be gods.

*

The women

The Pharisees despised women; and yet, they played a great part among them.

Someone could say that it's natural, especially if he has read his Nietzsche: "Are you dealing with women? Don't forget your whip!".

It is little known but entirely true that Nietzsche forgot his whip every time he dealt with women; moreover, he didn't even have one. That's precisely why he wrote that. Tell me what you brag about and I'll tell you what you lack.

The truth is that the Pharisees defended women, even though that went indirectly against the naturally brutal customs and the looseness of the Saducees standards (at least at the school of Hillel) when the relative stability of marriage was at stake.

That must have been the reason. They were the champions of regularity and of "conveniences"; and women need more of that than men.

In religious matters the Pharisees were the representatives of orthodoxy and observance. I'm not sure that as a rule women are more religious than men; but they are obviously more pious.

One always finds lots of pious women; and, in some cases, they are powerful.

That must be the key to what Josephus says, that the people followed the Pharisees "and especially the women". Because, on the other hand, the records clearly show, never mind what Josephus says, that the sect displayed an arrogant disdain towards them.

The Talmud itself records the dispute or talmudic question about the pureness or not of the priest who passed so closely to a woman that her shadow touched him, (in other words if, after that, he could celebrate or not).

But the best record of all is found in the Gospels: the scene of the woman taken in adultery by barking lunatics armed with stones who drag her like a

frightened animal and make her appear before Jesus Christ; Simon's disdain towards "This one, who calls himself a prophet" for allowing the Magdalene to weep over his feet; and perhaps even more revealing, how the disciples marveled to find him talking to a woman: "They marveled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?"

And yet, lots of women began to follow Jesus with devotion, selflessly and modestly; even when in certain cases, like in Magdalene's, they did what they could. And even this might have increased their hate. As we know by experience, jealousy is not impossible (even among religious people) on account of the feminine clientele. "This man deals with Publicans and prostitutes."

This saying, "he deals with prostitutes" is evidently a case of hyperbole and exaggeration suggesting something like "he deals with women; with all of them; with any kind."

Resentment too, unfailingly appears in the "pious" woman that to her dismay finds that she's not distinguished by the prophet and is treated in much the same way as the rest; Christ dealt with them all as sisters. "What's the matter with this man? Is he out of his mind?". The scene in Nazareth where they try to prevent him from going out because "he's a bit delicate-indisposed", echoes in itself a feminine piece of tidbit and parental worry.

E N D

"What is Truth? It is the man you have in front of you." The answer to Pilate's question is given with the very same letters: an anagram invented by Boethius and that delighted the Middle Ages.

An Argentine writer that delved into gardening and do-it-yourself activities.

An improvised musical dialogue, common among Argentina peasants ("gauchos").