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POR EL

R. P. FR. EVARISTO FERNANDEZ ARIAS

DEL ÓRDEN DE PREDICADORES

PROFESOR EN LA MISMA UNIVERSIDAD

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Á CARGO DE D. GERVASIO MEMUE

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FOREWORD

A LECTURE ON POSITIVISM

READ AT THE OPENING OF THE ACADEMIC STUDIES ON JULY 2, 1885

BY REV. FR. EVARISTO FERNANDEZ ARIAS, OP

Belen Lorezca-Tangco, OP

The honored Lecturer, Rev. Fr. Evaristo Fernandez Arias, OP commenced his Address with underscoring the imperative necessity for the annual opening lecture and the sacred duty to deliver it.

Man was born for the truth: the truth has its legitimate expression in science; and science, which, left to purely private action, would be seen subject to fickleness and indolence of individuals, as if sheltered in the public institutions of education where associated intelligences, under the direction of a dignified professor, are strengthened with the treasure of knowledge gathered in past generations, and the authority of the State watching with a foresight for the good of the citizenry, providing them with the necessary means for its greater enlightenment and culture. The opening of the University's academic studies has a double character of the solemn commendation of science, and of the fatherly care of the most noble necessities of the spirit. The august assembly of Faculty professors and students came to say that their beautiful ideal, all their aspirations, were encrypted in the truth which they invoked as inspiration in their studies, and to their achievement, they consecrated their vigils and toils. Truth, which is seen the heritage select from souls, the brilliant light, detached from God's crown, is reflected on the forehead of humanity to travel the roads of life.

In that current epoch, there were no doctrines so much opposed to truth, so harmful to science, so disturbing to society, as the doctrines of Positivism. The distinguished Lecturer was manifesting that Positivism "is absurd and antiscientific, because the principles upon which it is founded conflict with sound reason and blind the sources of the entire science."

What does Positivism consist of? What principles sustain that system by which a specie of historical selection presents us with a pretension of collecting by itself the fruits of the rest of philosophical systems? Positivism raises the fort of his science on two poles: the systematic negation or suppression of all metaphysics and with her all of absolute certainty, and the negation of the scientific valor of the idea of God. He builds his system over two (2)

grand negations: over two (2) abysses of darkness, thereafter taking charge of the radiant light of psychological and cosmologic observation to clear those dark horizons and reconstruct with new elements the crumbling fort of science.

Positivism states that God is antiscientific, that religion is antiscientific. Metaphysics is antiscientific or at the most the satisfaction of an ideal or a transient state of thought, or other more perfect state:

- (1) Moral and Religion,
- (2) the realization of certain purely human phenomena;

The world cannot recognize before reason neither first cause nor final cause; the soul is a result of the psychic forces which at its turn are the nervous forces. Or, what is the same: in Positivism everything is relative, everything is contingent, everything is mutable, phenomenal and perishable; there are no permanent beings nor necessary properties. For a Positivist, the world is a world of phenomena and variations parading before the intelligence, without there being subject in which these reside or substance they produce. He has relegated to oblivion the old principle that sciences are eternal and immutable or has amusingly hinged upon the mobility of sensible phenomena. He is disowned by God or feels unworthy of attention because he affirms that all is done and he alone deals on the works, and has the last explanation by himself or by himself, or by the analogous works.

An illustrious defender of Positivism was Herbert Spencer, a perceptive reasoner. His book, *Los Primeros Principios* (the First Principles) was most notable and profound from where Auguste Comte had named that school, and had come to light. He says from whatever point we take off, we always arrive at the same conclusion. If we make a hypothesis on nature and origin of things, we see that little by little we are brought with inexorable logic to the necessity of choosing between two preposterous ideas. If not, we make hypothesis, and taking from the sensible properties of the objects that surround us and finding out their special laws of dependence, we are satisfied with generalising these till we arrive at the most general of all, not for that we are nearest to recognising the causes of those properties. At times it seems to us that we clearly know these, but by close scrutiny makes us see that our knowledge apparently is completely irreconcilable with itself.

William Henry Hudson (1974) traces Spencer's fearless freedom of thought and judgment to the reasoner's father, a teacher by profession, who asserted that "education should aim not so much at loading the mind with information which must of necessity remain almost wholly unabsorbed and undigested, as at training the faculties of observation and reason, in such manner that the intellect should learn not only to acquire but also to organise knowledge for itself." Fostering originality and independence of thought, exciting interest, and nurturing reflective powers are more important than storing the memories of pupils with any quantity of merely bookish learning.

The English thinker –assertive and independent Herbert– says that the last religious ideas, same as the last scientific ideas are reduced to pure symbols without any cognisable reality. As civilization progressed, the conviction that human intelligence is incapable of an

absolute knowledge has been gaining ground. All possible concepts for discussion had been discussed but such had arrived at no positive outcome. All that was reached was a negation as formulated: that reality hidden in all appearances, is not and will always be unknown. Not only does a vigorous logic prove the incomprehensibility of fundamental concepts that we pretend to form, but also the relativity of all human knowledge could be directly and analytically manifested.

In Spencer's system of thought, a great intellectual potential with grand confusion of ideas and crass ignorance of religious dogmas could be discovered. He affirms that much of Christian Theory like that of Pantheist and atheist theories, are equally incapable of reasonably explaining the origin of the world and that of God alone remains for us an idea of the absolute and the limitless. He rejects the Christian concept of divinity with its attributes of wisdom and goodwill, activity and absurd providence, and affirms that the only thing that could be said is that God is unknowable. He affirms that the concept of cause, infinite and absolutely necessary to integrate the idea of God imply gathered mutual contradictions in; because the cause saying cause relationship in effect negates the absolute and the infinite. This last case supposes conscience, and conscience is inexplicable without relation between the subject and the object. He affirms that there is antagonism between the attributes of omnipotence and goodwill, justice and mercy, and between wisdom and divine liberties, between the existence of evil and the perfection of an infinite being. That which is relative (to say the world) cannot in some way proceed from the absolute, and as a general consequence the concept of an absolute and infinite being is fraught with contradictions in all respects.

The god which Spencer and the Positivists challenge is an absurd god, a mythical god; a god which they had fabricated to have the pleasure of destroying him; but the God which sound philosophy admits is a true God Who dispels all the contradictions alleged by atheist philosophy. The distinguished Lecturer avers that God lived, but He lives in eternity, and eternity not only does not mean time, but it excludes time. Also, time speaks of succession, and eternity speaks of permanence; time speaks of changes lost from a reality and acquisition by another reality; eternity speaks of a continuation essentially calm in a most perfect existence. Time suits contingent beings; eternity, the absolute and immutable, and this exclusively belongs to God because He Himself is existence- the Reality without limits, that is all Being, excluding all dependence, and is exterior and transcendent to all that exists outside of Him.

The absolute and the infinite not only do not challenge the concept of cause but these include it. What is absolute would like to speak of being in all its plenitude that it does not speak of relation to no other being, and the absolute that it be not infinitely active in being absurd, because activity is the manifestation of the perfection of a being which the more perfect it is, the more active it becomes. The concept of activity, of force, philosophically unites with the concept of perfection of being: so, activity is not only the development of being, the proper being manifesting itself; those beings more perfect are those which, in the highest degree, occupy in the order of causality. Thus, Catholicism puts in God, an infinite understanding and an intelligible infinity, and that same understanding and that same intelligibility as origin of His infinite operation and infinite power.

From there, God would be, as Saint Thomas Aquinas says, the “*principium essendi*” (principle of being) of all beings because God, being the purest act, the infinite perfection in being, covers contradiction that there exists something which had not received existence from that most perfect being.

The duality of subject and object which human conscience acknowledges and in which the philosophy of evolution so much insists, cannot exist in God: because it is the consequence of our imperfection; we do not have all that we need with ourselves for the development of our faculties. The Lecturer reacts and underscores that God, as infinite has in Himself everything; it is for Himself both subject and object. He alone is the principle and the end total of His operation, because His own infinity necessarily calls it. By virtue of the infinite perfection of God, divine understanding shows in Himself the specimen of all beings, the world archetype of the creatures which exist or have existed or merely possible. In this world of divine ideas, unity and plurality result: unity considered in God, plurality with respect to the beings represented. And as those ideas in God are the same God, from these in Him, the subject and the object, the intelligent act and the idea would be the same. The first truth- the fundamental in the study of God is the existence of being by essence, His infinity, His absolute perfection; the obstacles that occur after in research of His attributes are exclusively due to our intellectual poverty which desires to apply the modes of being and of peculiar knowing of the finite to the mode of being and understanding of the infinite.

How dared Spencer affirm that there was opposition between the omnipotence of God and His infinite goodness because He could not work but only what was good? Between His justice that punishes and His mercy that forgives; between His wisdom that all the future and His liberty that does not impede evil; between the existence of evil in things and the existence of essential goodness?

The Lecturer avers that the Positivist philosopher did not think that if in the world all were perfect, all would be God; that the existence of evil is a consequence of the existence of what is finite; and the desire for evil is by defect of the same rational creatures who are free not to do it, but spontaneously commit it. He did not think that if man likes what is evil, he likes it because it is finite, because it is contingent; and his intellectual light falters, and his heart is not entrenched in the ways of goodness. The most eloquent words of Saint Augustine in His Meditations reverberate:

As I said, a man of vanity, how did I know you, my God? Who else but you could know You? Because You alone are almighty, most glorious and most laudable ?.... You are grand without extensionand immense.....truly and infinitely good. You have made all things out of nothing, as You only willed it. **PS**

EVARISTO FERNANDEZ ARIAS TEJADO, OP: A native of Alcazar de San Juan (Ciudad Real), Evaristo Fernandez Arias Tejado was born on December 16, 1854. He received the habit at the Convent-College of Sto. Domingo de Ocaña on September 18, 1869. He made his simple profession in that convent on December 17, 1870, and his solemn profession on December 23, 1873. With a brilliant intelligence and great dedication to studies, he was one of the excellent students of his generation.

He was also one of the first young ones who came from Ocaña to do his theological studies in the then recently opened College of St. Thomas of Avila on October 1, 1876.

A fourth year Theology student and ordained in subdiaconate upon arrival in the Philippines, he received diaconate in Manila on May 26, 1877, and presbyterate on December 22, 1877. He was named Lector of Secondary Education in the Colegio de San Juan de Letran (Manila) on June 29, 1877. He took the examination as Confessor while being transferred to the University of Santo Tomas on July 8, 1879 as Lector of Humanities when he was named Director of Schoolboys whom he greatly influenced with his brilliant qualities. On June 30, 1887, he was promoted as Chair of theological fields. He also graduated as Doctor in this Faculty. On August 29, 1889, he was elected and confirmed Prior of Sto. Domingo Convent where he introduced many of the best materials and promoted the Holy Rosary especially in the month of October. In being elected Prior he had under his care the Chairs of Literature and of Theological realms.

He gave up these Chairs and on June 24, 1892 he was installed Professor of Moral Theology/Chair of Vespers. In 1894, concurrently Preacher-General, he continued his classes in Morals, at the same time, by order of superiors, enrolling himself in the Faculty of Civil Law in which he obtained his Licentiate. Then, he was named "Attorney of Debates," in-charge of defending before tribunals the interests of the Province, over all referring to the haciendas or agricultural properties. He did this with much competence in the diverse cases in which he had to intervene in those disastrous times of change in sovereignty of the Philippines. His fame as a good lawyer extended soon all over the city of Manila, and by that many came to his office without thereby abandoning the pulpit nor the Chair. After twenty-four (24) years of stay in the Philippines, where he left well-deserved fame of "famous writer, lawyer, philosopher, theologian, canonist, and orator," he was permitted to the Peninsula in 1901, quite resentful in his health, after having been witness to transcendental changes which occurred in the Philippines at the end of the century.

He was assigned to the Convent of Sto. Tomas de Avila as Professor of Moral Theology in the College and of Canon Law in the Diocesan Seminary. In 1904, he was elected and confirmed Rector of that College, at the same time continuing with his Chair of Theology. He participated in the Provincial Chapter of 1906, held in Ocaña, wherein he got elected as Diffinitor. In the beginnings of October 1907, he was diagnosed with a bad tongue which made it difficult for him to talk, and diagnosed with cancer, a little later. After eleven (11) months of severe pain, he died on August 29, 1908.