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T E N T A T I V E S

(We print brief excerpts from a manuscript,  
"An Anchor in the Latin Mind," by Francis  
G. Wilson, University of Illinois.)

If the classical world of the Greek and Latin language and of ancient learning is the foundation of our seven liberal arts, we must remember that the great conflicts of mind come from the same source. Our quarrels of today are the ancient quarrels, restated in other tongues and with variant nuance. But the quarrels over truth, except in the advanced science and technology of the modern age, are the ancient quarrels over what man is and who are his gods. We have new names but the modern conservative, liberal, or revolutionaty has his roots in the Mediterranean foundations of civilization...

If one will watch, the use of the word "prescind" is one token of the operation of the Latin mind. What this means is simply this, "let us distinguish."...Where the Latin takes hold, thinking will be clearer, but conflict will be sharper and more quick to emerge... It is particularly important to state here that realism for the Latin and realism for the American have different ambits. Latin realism, having separated and set apart religion and morality, however important they are to men, judges politics by a realistic or empirical standard... We Americans have claimed realism in the name of a popular pragmatism; but only for part of the way. For we will assert that we are realistic or scientific in order to attain our noble goals...

Americans today are still inclined to believe that there is a solution for all social questions. Political or organized action can bring about such change that even socialists or communists might hesitate to claim... The Latin mind, even if it is romantic or Catholic, might agree that the gods have given us problems we can never solve, not even by the most heroic measures...

The Latin liberal has bequeathed to all who are active in politics the classical notion of personality and its libertas. The attainment of liberty is to him the primary objective of man. R. G. Collingwood's preface to de Ruggiero states that liberalism "begins with the recognition that men, do what we will, are free; that a man's acts are his own, spring from his own personality, and cannot be coerced. But this freedom is not possessed at birth; it is acquired by degrees as a man enters into the self-conscious possession of his personality through a life of discipline and moral progress; renouncing the two opposite errors of forcing upon him a development for which he is inwardly unprepared, and leaving him alone, depriving him of that aid to progress which a political system, wisely designed and wisely administered, can give."...

For Gaetano Mosca the decisive element in liberty is not the participation of the masses in politics, but the juridical protection of the individual, a heritage from the classical Roman legal system... Moreover, we can say that among Latin liberals there is a rejection of all forms of utopianism, such as socialism, collectivism, or the dreams of a perfect technological achievement in a new order...

Every ideological struggle, every struggle in applying political theory in government, is in significant measure a struggle between intellectuals. Naturally in the West it is the struggles of the European intellectuals. But here the Latin intellectuals have been the most brilliant in their expression, for their impact has been through literary creation rather than through any form of political or scientific leadership. Their brilliance has been spread through the XX century, though some like Mosca, began their work in the last generation of the XIX century. Still, among those who have had the greatest impact on the theory of politics we must mention Benedetto Croce for his criticism of the politicians of post-Risorgimento times, and Vilfredo Pareto for a mathematical realism in the study of economic and political behavior. Pareto was called by the communists in the 1930s the Karl Marx of the bourgeoisie. Mosca's contribution was in the field of

method and in the study of the history of politics, much as with Guido de Ruggiero. Robert Michels, the Italian-Swiss student of the Left-wing and of the oligarchical trend in political parties, has had a profound impact on contemporary behavioral political science in America. His book Political Parties is one of the modern classics, and to combine this book with Georges Sorel's Reflexions sur la Violence is to provide oneself with a clue to the age. Guglielmo Ferrero moved from the study of classical history into meditation on legitimacy and power in the period after World War I. And Giovanni Sartori's Democratic Theory might very likely be the best of the books that have been produced in our generation on this subject. There is also the trilogy of great Spanish critics of politics: Miguel de Unamuno, George Santayana (the only man it was once said who ever resigned a professorship at Harvard), and José Ortega y Gasset, who is almost a universal man. These Spanish or Latin liberals are read by almost all of the literate through the West...

Generally, they are neither monarchists nor democrats. They have been unimpressed by the rhetoric of the democratic crusade, which has covered so many virtues and so many vices of political misunderstanding. In a sense they are all psychological naturalists, since though history is not always pattern, ...still men are not different from age to age. The patterns of history are the patterns of human behavior. They are the patterns of political and class conflict. As intellectuals, they share the unending historical antipathy of the philosopher for the businessman.

They are, even the one-time proletarians like Michels, aristocratic liberals, while the American-Northern European intellectuals have been protesting their democratic commitment. The Latin hardly bothers. He is concerned with a "political formula," perhaps even Machiavellian in nature, which will succeed in governing or establishing a system of public order in accordance with the nature of men. They want a governing order, whatever may be its structures, which will take account of the differences between men, but which will not be wrecked on equality..

In their conflict with other intellectuals they assert that they are on top of reality, that is, of behavior, and in this sense they are a kind of precursor of contemporary behavioral science. In their theory of politics they are probably closer to Burke and the British tradition than to others, and here the words conservative and liberal tend to lose significance. They invented, especially Ortega, the idea of the mass-man. Ever since the new barbarian fascists and communists have made their appearance, the Latin liberals have been busy delineating and analyzing the new political monstrosity of our days.

There is a further stage in the argument between the Latin-aristocratic liberal on the one hand, and the ritualistic liberal of the democratic crusade on the other. The classical world believed in only a very limited sense in the dominance of environment, for in modern terms the nature of men, and their genetic equipment, was what has determined the course of judgement and success or failure. For both the classical thinker and the Christian philosopher the social order was primarily voluntary and not determined. Always, however, any situation was

mixed with deterministic elements... On the other hand, the modern Latin liberal will say that the genetic principle will select men for their differences and not for their equality. But the theory of classical libertas would also say that superior people can serve disinterestedly, and that the humanistic intellectual is truly the one who is equipped to understand objective service to a culture.

The great event of our time has, indeed, been the defeat of the "ideologies," their loss of the power of myth, and a turning toward efficiency and technology in society and politics. There has been a failure of both dictatorship or of Napoleonic regimes on the one hand, and the failure of parties and parliaments on the other. The growth of executive power in alliance with efficiency and technology has been the story of our time. Such events do not mean a failure of the Latin mind. The Latin mind is not necessarily liberal or conservative, and it may be either Catholic or anticlerical, Christian or pagan. The defeat of the ideologies means the possibility of returning to Latin realism in the treatment of politics and its separation from cultural and literary achievements. Such a return would mean a condemnation of the return to romanticism, the romanticism of the fascists or the more current romanticism of the Liberals or conservatives in the world of parliaments and congresses...

The failure of the romanticisms of the XX century reaffirms that the greatest of Western secular continuities is Latin and classical intellectualism... What the Latin liberal gets from classical culture is the discovery of the search for excellence. It is the excellence of the spoudaios, as Voegelin said, as he is described in Aristotle's Ethics. In one sense it is the power and the sovereignty of the secular intellectual that is at stake, and in another sense it is the achievement of moderation, with the ultimate advancement of the common man as an ideal--within the limits and the reality of the possible in politics.

The free society has a right to be preserved against the new barbarians, and the liberty of the individual must lift him out of the possibility of submergence in the group. What the Latin mind seeks in its search for excellence is that the superior types of "political" people should be in the ruling order in all of the complicated aspects of our society. Though representative institutions and the rule of law would be preserved--if possible in such an age as ours--it would be still a political order according to the spirit and proposals of Edmund Burke. The Latin liberal blends with the conservative of our time... The form of government is not so important to the Latin mind, conservative or liberal, religious or non-religious, as the political formula on which an attempt is made to ground the political order.