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CHRISTIANS IN SEARCH OF NON-CHRISTIAN  
CERTITUDES: NATURISM, SPIRITUALISM,  
THEOSOPHY (FROM CATALONIA TO ASIATIC  
CULTURES, 1917–1930)

My contribution to this conference came from the following experience: I am working on a biography of a Spanish social activist who lost his Catholic faith in his youth and began searching for truth in the most varied experiences: he tried Esperanto, continued with naturism, then spiritualism and finally arrived to theosophy.\* His name was Guillem Rovirosa.

Rovirosa studied Management in the Electrical and Mechanical Industries School of Barcelona Industrial University. It was a very interesting Catalan institution that brought together a group of very singular students. As much as possible, I have reconstructed the lives of each member of this group, as well as that of Rovirosa, since 1917, and have observed several affinities among them. They were all people with a deep interest in any technical novelty and shared an important ability to innovate (a great propensity for creativity). Rovirosa was himself an inventor of most diverse types of electromechanical solutions, from mechanical toys to cinematographic projectors and even an electromechanical method to make wines age faster – perhaps much faster – than usual<sup>1</sup>; his friend Josep Grau was one of the promoters of

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<sup>1</sup> Xavier Garcia, *Rovirosa: El hombre y los hechos*, vol. 1: *Los primeros treinta años (1897–1933)*, ed. with an introduction by José Andrés-Gallego & Donato Barba Prieto, Madrid: Ediciones HOAC.

using X-rays in Spain<sup>2</sup>. Josep Grau's brother Jaume was not a student, but worked in the Industrial University and installed a chemistry lab at his home for his own entertainment and because he was a good poet and appreciated chemical reactions as aesthetic experiences<sup>3</sup>.

The fourth friend – Frederic Pujulà i Vallès – was the eldest of the group and exerted great influence on the rest. He had finished his studies in law in Barcelona University before his future companions began their own professional careers in 1917. In this year, Rovirosa was the youngest of the lot, aged twenty, while Jaume Grau was twenty-one, Josep Grau twenty-nine and Pujulà forty. He was a lawyer and also a very creative and innovative modernist writer. He did not understand anything about electromechanics or chemistry, but he knew Esperanto very well, he was a poet, just like the Grau brothers, and – judging by his later attitudes – also lost his Catholic faith much like his three companions.

This group of friends and companions included more members. However, I focus on these four because I have worked with very rich documentation of Rovirosa's life and studied the personal archives of Pujulà and Jaume Grau, the latter containing sufficient information about his brother Josep as well. In all, I have enough documentation to study their lives, feelings and thoughts<sup>4</sup>.

When I was studying Rovirosa's interests in Esperanto, naturism, spiritualism and theosophy between 1917 and 1930, I read – naturally – some Spanish historiography on them and discovered a link – or, rather, a multitude of links – among some of these five concerns of Rovirosa's: Esperanto, anarchism, naturism, spiritualism, and theosophy. So I wonder whether Rovirosa's interest in them between 1917 and 1930 was a result of personal experiences or a logical and – for some people – historical sequence and, in this case, could be the reason for their connections. This is the subject of this essay.

I would like to propose that the experience of these four companions

<sup>2</sup> *Diario de Villanueva y Geltrú*, 1910-02-19.

<sup>3</sup> Jaume to Josep Grau, 10 April 1941, in: *Katalano Esperanto Federacio archives*, (henceforth – *KEFA*), f. Jaume Grau Casas.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* Frederic Pujulà i Vallès fund is in the Biblioteca de Catalunya.

was a way of searching for a non-Christian alternative to their Catholic upbringing.

In fact, the point of departure for that sequence of four movements was not Esperanto, the universal language created by Ludwik Lazarus Zamenhof, the well known Russian-Polish Jew<sup>5</sup>. Remember that the four companions were Catalanists (Catalan nationalists), and Catalanism had (and still has) a very strong linguistic foundation. So among the Catalanists of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, Esperanto was seen as the best way out of any linguistic dependence: first from Spanish (i.e., Castilian) and then from French, which was the *lingua franca* for diplomatic and international relations in the whole world of that time. In 1905, Pujulà – the modernist writer – had the first great political Catalanist coalition in history, the Catalanist Union (*Unió catalanista*), accept the compromise of teaching Esperanto. In the future independent or autonomous Catalonia, children were to study Catalan as their mother tongue and Esperanto as their second language<sup>6</sup>.

We may not think, however, that it was either the single or the main reason to wish for the triumph of Esperanto in Catalonia. Esperanto provided hope to any people aspiring to universal understanding and a more loving comprehension of the whole humankind. It was an idealistic proposal; perhaps the last great idealistic – and rationalist – proposal in linguistics<sup>7</sup>. Its simplicity, its rationality and the extent of the change that its imposition could bring to the whole world were very attractive for the Spanish people as various as Catholic priests, army officers, freemasons, anarchists, even vegetarians<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> René Centassi, Henri Masson, *L'homme qui a défié Babel: Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof*, París: Ramsay, 1995, p. 398.

<sup>6</sup> Francesc Poblet i Feijoo, *Els inicis del moviment esperantista a Catalunya: La komenca esperanto-movado en Katalunio*, Sabadell: Associació Catalana d'Esperanto & O Limco Edicions, 2004, pp. 26, 28.

<sup>7</sup> José Passini, *Bilingüismo: Utopia ou antibabel*, Campinas, SP: Juiz de Fora Mg & Edujff, 1993, p. 154.

<sup>8</sup> Francesc Poblet i Feijoo, *El Congrés Universal d'Esperanto de 1909 a Barcelona: La Universala Kongreso de Esperanto de 1909 en Barcelono*, Sabadell: Associació Catalana d'Esperanto, 2008, p. 35.

Our four companions came from very different backgrounds. Pujulà was probably born to a middle-class family. He frequented the bohemian milieu in *fin du siècle* Barcelona. In fact, he was a regular client of *Els quatre gats* (“The four cats”), a cafe that remained open between 1897 and 1903 and was the epicenter of the aesthetic modernism. It was located on the ground floor of a building that was also modernist, Martí house, designed by the architect and also Catalanist politician Josep Puig y Cadafalch. *Els quatre gats* was at the same time a cafe, an art gallery, a venue for literary readings and concerts and, of course, for *tertulias* (habitual friends gatherings). There, the young Andalusian painter Pablo Picasso immortalized Pujulà and the most singular people he knew in the Barcelonese bohemia in a celebrated series of portraits. Other Catalan painters and writers (Ramón Casas, Santiago Rusiñol, Miguel Utrillo) were the owners of that little enterprise, inspired by the Parisian cabaret *Le chat noir* (active between 1881 and 1897)<sup>9</sup>.

Pujulà, a Catalanist himself, became famous in 1905, when some army officers from Barcelona garrison stormed and vandalized the offices of *Cu-Cut!*, a satirical Catalan journal that mocked the Spanish army as from continuously defeated. You must remember that seven years before, in 1898, Spanish army had been effectively beaten by the US marines in Cuba and the Philippines, and this had spelled the end of Spain’s Asian-American colonial empire<sup>10</sup>. Pujulà reported about the aggression against the *Cu-Cut!* in the Parisian Esperantist journal *Tra lo mondo* and was tried in a military court, so he opted for exile in France. In order to be able to return to Spain without any problems, he became a French citizen and, in 1908, when he could return, he received a great formal

<sup>9</sup> Marilyn McCully, *Els Quatre Gats: Art in Barcelona around 1900*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 159; María Teresa Puig, Sonia Serrano, *Els Quatre Gats: Cerveteria, restaurante modernista, pinacoteca: Breus anotacions del seu origen*, Barcelona: Els Quatre Gats, 1994, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Joaquín Romero-Maura, *The Spanish Army and Catalonia: The “Cu-Cut! Incident” and the Law of Jurisdictions, 1905–1906*, London: Sage, 1976, p. 31; Ricardo Lezcano, *La ley de jurisdicciones, 1905–1906 (Una batalla perdida para la libertad de expresión)*, Madrid: Akal, 1978, p. 185; María Isabel García Soler, *El militarismo y su significado en la sociedad española de la Restauración: La Ley de Jurisdicciones*, Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, 1992, p. 473.

homage in Barcelona<sup>11</sup>. In 1921 he joined the freemasons and began a promising political career that would be interrupted by Primo de Rivera's dictatorship between 1923 and 1930 and by the civil war of 1936–1939<sup>12</sup>.

The Grau brothers came from a very different background, but they arrived to meet Pujulà in Esperanto's camp; they were born to a poor Catholic family; one of their grandfathers was a Carlist – a traditionalist – and their father was remembered as an “honest worker” – probably a porter of a house – who joined the Regionalist League (*Lliga regionalista* in Catalan), the first great conservative Catalanist party, founded in 1901. Both brothers as well as their only sister – were naturally intelligent, which allowed them to become autodidact. Great lovers of Esperanto, the eldest brother Josep was more realistic than his younger sibling Jaume who became an esteemed poet in Esperanto and whose political evolution turned him from a conservative to a radical Catalanist when the civil war broke out. Involved in the 1934 revolution – a revolutionary mixture of Catalanists, anarchists, and socialists – and convicted by a military court when this revolution was defeated, he remained in prison in 1934–1935. Afterwards, during the Spanish civil war, he was also sucked into struggles between leftist factions that erupted in Catalonia in 1938. He opted for exile in France in 1939 and spent nine years in French and German concentration camps with Jews and Spanish leftist prisoners: he spent time in Argelès, Bram, Argelès again, Récébedou, Nexon, Séreilhac, Tombebouc, Toulouse (1939–1948)<sup>13</sup>. In 1944, in his unpublished writings – memoirs written while interned in these camps – he introduced himself as a communist, an admirer of Joseph Stalin, an agnostic, but one who used to pray Our Father when his loneliness and, sometimes, fear got the better of him<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Francesc Santolaria Torres, “El fets del *Cu-cut!*: Una reflexió historiogràfica”, in: *Els fets del Cu-cut!: Taula rodona organitzada pel Centre d'Història Contemporània de Catalunya el 24 de novembre de 2005*, Barcelona: Centre d'Història Contemporània de Catalunya, 2006, p. 123.

<sup>12</sup> A copy of official freemason documents concerning him in 1921–1947, in: *KEFA*, f. Jaume Grau Casas.

<sup>13</sup> According to his biography in: <http://lacomunidad.elpais.com/usuarios/jgraug>.

<sup>14</sup> See his unpublished *La Química i l'Alquímia, l'Astronomia i l'Astrologia, la Medicina i la Religió*, in: *KEFA*, f. Jaume Grau Casas.

Before that, in 1917–1918, when they met each other, Rovirosa – the fourth of the group – also sympathized with active Catalanism; but he was the most anticlerical of the four friends and the most critical of Christianity. Only Pujulà could consider his positions close to Rovirosa's. Rovirosa was born to a well-off middle-class family of Villanueva y Geltrú, also in Catalonia. In 1920 he had to abandon his studies because of and, in 1921, he got married. He lost touch with the other three friends, it seems, in 1930, when he and his wife emigrated to Paris in order to make more profit from his electromechanical inventions<sup>15</sup>.

Above, I have mentioned the success of Esperanto among Spanish anarchists and Spanish vegetarians. The two groups are quite different, but the dissimilarity should not be exaggerated. Remember that I have also mentioned Catholic priests among Esperantists. In 1909, the Universal Esperanto Congress was held in Barcelona and the bishop of Barcelona went ahead to concede a license provided in Catholic canon law to eat meat on two Fridays during the Congress<sup>16</sup>. It was not a question of whether the congressmen were Catholic or not; it did not matter.

But for some people it was a big problem; when the fifth Esperantist, Francisco Ferrer Guardia, went to participate in the Esperanto Congress, he was arrested by the police and accused of being the main instigator of the “Tragic Week”<sup>17</sup>. The “Tragic Week” was the name given to the last week of July 1909 – some weeks before the Universal Esperanto Congress; it was the first anti-Catholic social explosion in Spain in the twentieth century; it began as a general strike and degenerated into systematic destruction of religious buildings and persecution of priests and nuns<sup>18</sup>. In fact, Ferrer Guardia was a modest railway employee, an autodidact, and a promoter of schools – he called them “The Modern

<sup>15</sup> Xavier Garcia, *Rovirosa*.

<sup>16</sup> Francesc Poblet i Feijoo, *El Congrés Universal d'Esperanto de 1909*, pp. 33–34.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28, Francesc Poblet i Feijoo, *Els inicis del moviment esperantista a Catalunya*, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Analecta sacra Tarraconensia: Actes de les jornades sobre la Setmana Tràgica (1909): Barcelona, 5, 6 i 7 de maig de 2009*, Barcelona: Barcelona Balmesiana, 2009, vol. 82.

School” – where children were instructed in anarchism, according to documents read in the Spanish Parliament during a debate that his execution provoked<sup>19</sup>. He had inherited a fortune from his dealings with a French lady and used it to publish anti-ecclesial, antimilitarist and Republican books and pamphlets, arguing for free love and universal happiness, but also condoning violence, if necessary, against the State, the Army and the Church. It is unlikely that he provoked the outburst of the Tragic Week. But judicial and governmental authorities were of a different opinion and he was sentenced to death, executed and became a martyr and a symbol of free thought in entire Europe<sup>20</sup>.

Still in 1929, the Spanish socialist Manuel Burgos insisted on the value of Esperanto for redeeming the working class and on the possibility of reconciling that language with historical materialism<sup>21</sup>.

In respect to the possibility of relating anarchy and naturism, we must also remember that naturism was more than a diet option. In the end, it responded to the conviction that there is a natural order and the best thing is to bring human life closer to that order. Naturists did propose to entirely eliminate artifices – Esperanto was artificial – yet they confined artifices to what was necessary – including not only food but also attitudes. For a naturist, it made sense to feed on vegetables, without killing any animals, but the whole existence had to be conceived in terms of peace and not violence. They were, therefore, peaceful and, because of that, also enemies of any constraint, including that constituted by political authority, however legitimate it could seem. In fact, many of them arrived to the conclusion that a natural ideal of life was anarchist and, in that vein, tried to articulate their own lives in small

<sup>19</sup> I quoted and commented on several of them in “Sobre las formas de pensar y de ser”, in: *Revolución y Restauración, 1868–1931*, t. XVI, vol. 1: *Historia general de España y América*, Madrid: Edit. Rialp, 1981, pp. 283–382, especially chap. 6: “Las otras éticas”.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Dolors Marín, *La Semana Trágica: Barcelona en llamas, la revuelta popular y la Escuela Moderna*, Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2009; Juan Avilés, *Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, pedagogo, anarquista y mártir*, Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2006; Jordi de Cambra Bassols, *Anarquismo y positivismo: El caso Ferrer*, Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1981.

<sup>21</sup> See Manuel M. Burgos, *Un idioma para el mundo proletario: El esperanto*, Valencia: Cuadernos de Cultura, 1933, pp. 24–29.



communities like the so-called “Naturist Cultural Society” of Alcoy, the Valencian town.

I mention the fact because it was one of the first naturist societies in Spain and because Rovirosa and his wife joined it in 1922, albeit only for a few weeks, perhaps two months.

The formal foundation of this “Naturist Cultural Society” of Alcoy coincided with the Naturist Assembly held in Valencia in 1923, which lent more resonance to the Alcoyan initiative<sup>22</sup>. In addition to vegetarianism, the Alcoyan naturists practiced nudism in a waterfall near the town. In their old pictures, however, they appear in underwear, discreetly<sup>23</sup>, perhaps out of decency. It is possible that in 1923 to be dressed in underwear was regarded as sufficiently revolutionary or even as a close equivalent to nude.

In 1924, Rovirosa’s life suffered a serious blow: the death of his brother in law Josep Canals with whom he had shared a great friendship and plans for future professional activities. Then Rovirosa turned to a practice that was already widespread in Spain: spiritualism. A spiritualist meeting usually involves a medium – generally a woman – who allows people sitting around a table to resume relations hips with dear but dead people.

This practice had already provoked heated disputes with Catholic writers, especially in the nineteenth century. In the eighties, a known Catalan theologian, Perujo, publicly refuted the works by Camille Flammarion, whose *Lumen: A History of a Comet in the Infinite* had been translated and published in Spain in 1874, two years after its original French edition<sup>24</sup>. Flammarion was a popular writer fond of scientific esoteric astronomic speculations.

<sup>22</sup> About this Assembly see Josep María Roselló, *La vuelta a la naturaleza: El pensamiento naturista hispano (1890–2000): Naturismo libertario, trofología, vegetarianismo naturista, vegetarianismo social y librecultura*, Barcelona: Virus editorial, 2003, p. 46.

<sup>23</sup> Agustín Belda Carbonell, *Naturismo, filosofía universal: 70 años de naturismo y desnudismo en Alcoy*, Alcoy: Gráficas el Cid, 1984, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Camille Flammarion, *Lumen: Historia de un cometa: en el infinito: Narración sobre el tiempo y el espacio como espíritu*, Madrid: Impr. y Libr. de Gaspar, 1874; Niceto Alonso Perujo, *Narraciones de la eternidad: Estudio sobre la vida de ultratumba, según los principios de la filosofía natural en constestación a la obra “Narraciones del infinito”, Lumen de Mr. Flammarion*, Madrid: Impr. y Libr. de J. Gaspar, 1882.



In the eighties, a very popular Catalan priest – Félix Sardá y Salvany – published two little books, one directed against political liberalism and another one criticizing spiritualism. The first volume – *Liberalism is a sin* (1884) – was translated into several languages and became a bestseller<sup>25</sup>. Both books by Sardá attracted significant criticism<sup>26</sup>. Spiritualism had started to become a popular practice, albeit clandestine, but polemicists realized the potential relationship between political and religious freedom, even when it concerned a cult as singular as spiritualism.

It is more remarkable that this relationship between political and religious freedoms was actively defended by relationship anarchists, especially in Catalonia. Among Catalan and other European anarchists, spiritualism became the true mystical aspect of universal love and happiness.

Roviroso remained involved in spiritualism for two years, until about 1926. An avid reader, he read all spiritualist literature that he was able to find. He spoke French, English, Italian, in addition to Catalan and Spanish, and tried to discover theoretical foundations of any question and topic he studied. So he applied his usual rigour to his spiritualist readings and did not find any serious – or, above all, verifiable – explanation of spiritualism, and so rejected it as theosophy.

Paradoxically, his frustration with spiritualist literature was greater because of the qualification of the author he read: the French doctor Charles Robert Richet, Nobel prize winner in 1913 and one of the first true experts on parapsychology; his *Treaty on Metaphysics*, published in French in 1922, was translated to Spanish in 1923 and had a second Spanish edition in 1925, just as Roviroso was searching for a solution for his religious preoccupations outside of Christianity<sup>27</sup>. Richet's book was perhaps the first great scientific study about spiritualism; Roviroso was greatly impressed by his work, but the impossibility to verify experimentally Richet's theories left him disappointed. Then he heard about theosophy.

<sup>25</sup> Antonio Moliner Prada: *Félix Sardà i Salvany y el integrismo en la Restauración*, Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Vid. *Refutación a los folletos El liberalismo es pecado y ¿Qué hay sobre el espiritismo? del Sr. D. Félix Sardá y Salvany, Pbro.*, Barcelona: Graf. Futura, 1887.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Robert Richet, *Tratado de metafísica: Cuarenta años de trabajos psíquicos*, Barcelona: Araluce, 1923 (2nd edition 1925, with a prologue by the author).

Roviroso came into contact with Barcelona's theosophists and he devoured the works by Helen Blavatsky, one of the founders of the Theosophical Society in 1875, whose main books had been translated to Spanish as early as 1893, two years after her death. In Roviroso's days, 1925, her main book, *The Secret Doctrine About the Creation*<sup>28</sup>, was translated into Spanish. Encountering these and other writings, Roviroso was dazzled by Asian religious experiences, especially by Hinduism. Years later, he confessed that he had become really excited. He dedicated three years to theosophy. He came to join the Spanish Theosophical Society, which had its headquarters in Barcelona. He became enthusiastic about the society's motto: "There is no religion above the truth". He studied theosophical writings and saw that theosophists professed active syncretism; they claimed that all religions contained some truth, but neither had all the truth. However, to improve oneself, it was not sufficient to accept all religions, it was necessary to separate the wheat from the chaff, one by one, and thus to construct a synthetic religion, one containing only truth.

So he began to study all historical religions except Christianity, since he considered that Christianity was already superseded. By contrast, each new discovery in other religions brought him real pleasure, as he remembered later. His preferences, however, soon turned to the religion of the ancient Parsees, based on the wisdom of Hermes, also Buddhism, poetic as it is, and above all Hinduism. He also found the wonderful wisdom of Confucius, though, in his opinion, it could not be considered a real religion<sup>29</sup>.

Theosophy had gained force in Spain in the 1870s. It was crucial to protect the wealthy Catalan José Xifré Hamel, a convinced theosophist. He financed the magazine *Sophia*, which was published between 1893 and 1914, and was soon joined by other journals in Seville, Barcelona,

<sup>28</sup> H. P. Blavatsky, *La doctrina secreta de la creación*, Barcelona: B. Bauza, 1925; see also Curuppumullagē Jinarājadā, *L'ideari de la teosofia: Conferència donada a l'estatge de l'Ateneu Barceloni el dia 4, d'octubre*, Barcelona: Impr. Joan Sallent, 1927.

<sup>29</sup> Roviroso: *Rasgos autobiográficos* (1956), *Archivo de la Comisión Permanente de la HOAC*, f. Xavier Garcia, and also his "El primer traidor cristiano: Judas de Keiro, el apóstol", in: *Obras completas*, vol. 1, Madrid: Ed. HOAC, 1995, pp. 548–549.

Madrid as well as many minor bulletins. By then, Xifré was in contact with engineer Francisco Montoliú and doctor José Roviralta, both Catalan too. Xifré had inherited a fortune from his father, one of many Catalans who had god enriched in Cuba, from where he had returned in the mid-nineteenth century. Once back in Catalonia, he established a relationship with the French consul in Barcelona, Ferdinand Lesseps, who told him about his projects to link the Red Sea with the Mediterranean via the Isthmus of Suez, and, indeed, Xifré's father was one of the first shareholders of this famous project<sup>30</sup>.

Xifré's father was already fond of occultism and any variety of breakthrough approaches, as was his son later on. Josep Grau's technical training had similar origins. In the first half of the twentieth century, he was one of the advocates of using X-rays in Spain, before and after his studies together with Roviroso of 1917. The Grau family was poor; Josep probably began as a stoker in the Catalan railways when he was very young<sup>31</sup>. But he took full advantage of a cultural and technical initiative promoted and financed by another wealthy Catalan businessman, Catholic aristocrat Eusebio Güell, the count of Güell. Educated on social Catholicism, Güell instructed his collaborator Ferrán Alsina, an eminent textile technician, to design and manage a colony – a community of homes – for workers of his factory in Santa Coloma de Cervelló, in Catalonia. Alsina also had a solid knowledge in physics and economics and some of his science writings were translated at least into French<sup>32</sup> and, in 1907, he created a so-called “experimental physics cabinet”, a “Mentora” – probably an Esperanto name that may mean

<sup>30</sup> See Antonio Guardiola, *El canal de Suez y Lesseps: La alucinante historia del famosísimo canal*, Madrid: Revista Literaria Novelas y Cuentos, 1957; see also Juan Bautista Vilar, “España en Suez, Mar Rojo y Adén durante el siglo XIX”, in: *Judería de Tetuán y otros ensayos*, Murcia: Universidad, 1969, pp. 163–196.

<sup>31</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 1904-08-10, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Eusebio Güell, López-Bacigalupi Güell, *Perspectivas de la vida*, Madrid: s. i., 1930; see also Pedro Gual Villalbí, *Biografía de Eusebio Güell y Bacigalupi, primer conde de Güell, escrita para el acto de colocar su retrato en la galería de catalanes ilustres*, Barcelona: Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 1953; Miguel d'Esplugues, *El primer conde de Güell: Notes psicològiques i assaig sobre el sentit aristocràtic a Catalunya*, Barcelona: Arts Gràfiques Nicolau Poncell, 1921.

“mentor” in the sense of “master” – where everyone could see the newest mechanisms and their functions<sup>33</sup>.

The young stoker Josep Grau did not waste the opportunity. He frequented the experimental physics cabinet studying its machines and eventually organizing guided tours to the Mentora. His interests finally settled on X-rays, as we know, and he became a prominent expert of them<sup>34</sup>.

Rovirosa abandoned his theosophist convictions in 1928. He was not a rationalist; he recognized a continuous presence of mystery in his life and in any other life he examined. Simultaneously, though, he was very systematic and analytic in his way of thinking and working. He was always searching for a way to apply and to advance any knowledge he had. So, as a theosophist, he first studied the main theosophical writings and then began to research them. He concluded that all religions that withstood theosophical criticism were pantheistic. In particular, Hinduism proposed an idea of the norigin of the universe that could be reconciled with Evolutionism, but, like Evolutionism, raised the problem of the origin. He concluded that the truth lay neither in any religion or in all of them together. He fell into total skepticism. There was no way of knowing anything that transcended matter. Technique was the only approach that gave him a sense of full security. He was, after all, an accomplished technician. For him, those were the “truly true” things, he concluded<sup>35</sup>.

He recovered his Catholic faith in 1934. You may ask how it was possible that Brahmanic emanation took him to skepticism and, five years later, he returned to Christianity, embracing, among other things, a belief in Creation by God. Well, it is paradoxically easy to explain it. What he discovered in 1933 was a distinction between Christianity and Christ as a historical person. He lived in Paris with his wife and one day, as he was going back home, he saw a little crowd in the street; he asked to know the reason for that little meeting and someone told him that

<sup>33</sup> *Índice de los aparatos y demás elementos de estudio expuestos en la Mentora*, Barcelona: Henrich y Ca, 1907.

<sup>34</sup> *Diario de Villanueva y Geltrú*, 1910-02-19.

<sup>35</sup> Rovirosa, *Rasgos autobiográficos*.

cardinal Jean Verdier was preaching in a nearby church; it was the chapel of the Catholic Institute of Paris, a very important institution for the so-called “sacred sciences”. Verdier had announced his intention to promote the establishing of a hundred parishes in the *banlieues* of Paris. It was supposed to add a service – a religious one, though not exclusively – to the people who inhabited those suburbs. The scheme also included an ambition to create jobs, as France suffered great unemployment following the 1929 crisis. And in order to make that happen, it was necessary to get a huge loan in order to pay for constructions. But aside from that, he commissioned young and daring architects, mainly Le Corbusier, to do the designs of the chapels. And Le Corbusier proposed a first design for a chapel that broke with the architectural tradition in Catholic religious buildings. Many people argued about all that, although they were not necessarily Catholic, like Rovirosa. Verdier’s proposal had become a cultural, even aesthetic problem, although a happy one for some people, unemployed or destitute.

On that day of 1933, moved by curiosity to know this priest, Rovirosa peeked into that church to see the famous cardinal, and as he did just that Verdier said almost verbatim: We are in the times of “specialists”, everyone talks about this or that “specialist”. As Christians, we have to be specialists in Christ.

Rovirosa considered himself a specialist in electromechanics. The expression “specialist” was familiar for him. And he discovered that he could consider himself a real specialist in Christianity – that he refuted – but not in Christ. He realized that he did not know anything about the historical person of Christ, a human being with his own life. And he began to do what he always did when he had a problem: first, to research what specialists already had some expertise on the matter and then try to instruct himself through work and study. Some months later, he made a confession before an Augustinian and received what he would call his “second first communion”. He had received his first communion when was a child, like most Spaniards<sup>36</sup>.

Pujulá, the modernist writer and a freemason, was tried by a special

<sup>36</sup> *Diario de Villanueva y Geltrú*, 1910-02-19.

anti-Masonic court after the Spanish civil war, forced to retract his ideas, and spent the rest of his life engaged in literary writing, but publishing hardly anything. A great part of his unpublished work contains religious references. I am not able to add anything about his convictions in his later life; only that many of those religious references are funny, humorous, clearly anticlerical<sup>37</sup>.

Moreover, after the war, the prudent and competent Josep Grau became an employee in the Siemens factory of Spain, in Valencia.

Of the four companions, the most singular and dramatic trajectory was that of his brother Jaume, the Esperantist poet. According to his writings in concentration camps, he had lost the habit of praying when he was thirteen, but now he did pray sometimes. He would say Our Father in order not to blaspheme, he sometimes wrote. When we are completely alone and helpless, he wrote in 1944, we need to find someone to protect us. According his notes, it does not matter whether we feel protected by Stoic philosophy or by God or the Virgin of the Helpless (*Desamparados* in Spanish). We must remember that praying to the Virgin of the Helpless has been a widespread practice in Catalonia and throughout the Spanish Mediterranean coast since the times when North African Muslim pirates captured boaters and people who lived near that coast.

In situations of loneliness and despair, Jaume Grau used to pray himself to sleep with Our Father, just like he did when he was a child, he writes. In concentration camps, when he spent months without any news from home, when he was hungry, cold or in misery, he felt the need to pray. Saying Our Father, he explained, made him think he was seeing his own father and saying “goodnight” to everybody in his household.

He did not recover his Christian faith. For him, religion was simply a force, a very strong force, and therefore did not need ministers or representatives of God, temples or shrines or altars. Actually, he adds, it is so because even irreligious people are religious<sup>38</sup>. Is it so?

<sup>37</sup> His papers, in: *Biblioteca Central de Catalunya* (Barcelona, Spain), f. Pujulà i Vallès.

<sup>38</sup> Grau, *La Química i l'Alquímia...*, I, ff. 2-7.