

## REVOLUTION & THE PRESS

by Otto Scott

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F. Scott Fitzgerald came into contact with the power worshippers of Hollywood and came away with an interesting definition. A first-class mind, he said, can accept and retain the existence of two sets of facts that appear to contradict each other.

As we know, most people can't do that. They will accept a set of facts or their contrary—but not both. They will argue from one set of facts or their contrary forever, instead of seeking the connections between apparent contradictions.

To understand the role of the press in revolution, however, we must accept the press as both important in the fight for freedom and a tool of oppression throughout its history. It has not been simply one or the other: it has been both.

Beyond that, the press is a tool of society, and cannot be accurately assessed outside that context. If we want to understand the role of the press in revolution, we should not start with newspapers, but with revolution.

Once that examination is launched, we discover that revolutions are not as common as we have been told. A revolution that topples an entire civilization, in which all, or nearly all knowledge is lost, a worldwide religion shattered, is rare. In that grand sense there have been only three revolutions in the history of the West.

The first of these took place eons ago in ancient Egypt. Only its echoes reach us today, together with fragments of that bygone civilization. Scientists now believe that Egypt was once very advanced mathematically, and that

its elite knew astronomy to an extent only recently rediscovered after the telescope. Egyptians, they say, knew of the precession of the equinoxes—the slow turning of the earth upon its axis in space—which takes nearly 26,000 years. Similarly, the Egyptians are considered to have known the shape of the earth, its rotation, to have developed tools capable of cutting stone and marble to precise tolerances, and to bond them with cement stronger than any we now produce.<sup>1</sup>

On a higher level the Egyptians had a religion based upon firm moral principles, believed in an afterlife and a final judgment. They maintained a strict control over what they considered sacred information through their priests. The civilization they epitomized appears to have been worldwide. Similar beliefs were held in such widely separated regions as northern England, Malaysia, deep Africa and Polynesia. Secret information was translated to the people in the form of allegories, poems and liturgy.<sup>2</sup>

Problems apparently developed when disputes arose among the priests. We know little about these, except that in some manner the line between the sacred and the profane was crossed. By profane, we mean the dictionary definition: of using sacred information in an unholy way. Once that occurs, the religion of a civilization is in trouble. In the instance of Egypt we know that violence erupted, Egyptian unity was shattered and the land was invaded. After that its culture drifted downward and its secret knowledge was lost—though legends linger to this day.

That was the first great revolution and its effects appear to have been worldwide. The simplest facts, such as the shape of the earth, were forgotten. The world drifted into a Dark Age marked by confusion, lack of records and blind struggles.

Later we find the Greeks—men from nowhere—striving to reinvent mathematics, with no knowledge of the proper shape of the earth, using an inherited, fixed Zodiac—as though stars do not move—as a tool for spells and predictions. Their religion, which lacked a firm moral base, resembled the legends of the ancients but lacked their inner key to coherence. They considered the cosmos a closed orb which rolled around them forever, making all events and every life subject to eternal and endless repetition. To divert themselves from this gloomy conclusion they invented theater, and in this new, interesting dimension evoked emotions once limited to the temple.



The most powerful of their dramas were tragic, in which men were portrayed as helpless before the gods. Plato regarded these as dangerous and malignant, and warned against the abuse of the imagination in art.

This is relevant because the Greek theater contained parallels with the modern press. Living men and their opinions were caricatured—as were the gods. The line between the sacred and the profane was broken, and philosophy rose to challenge religion. It was not long, as time is measured in the lives of nations, before the Greek unity was broken, and their culture declined.

The Romans are credited with bringing order to that decay, but it was the order of force. Despite the illusions of Victorian schoolmasters, neither the Greeks nor the Romans were capable of a high intellectual order. Their science did not progress beyond engineering; their astronomy never equalled the Babylonians. Neither created a religion with a strong moral base and their political experiments all ended in tyrannies. Their societies were uneasy, turbulent and hedonistic—for they were, in the final judgment—elegant barbarians.<sup>3</sup>

Then came the next great revolution, of which we are the heirs. It began in the temples of the Jews and spread first conversationally and then by a book. It did not struggle for physical supremacy. It did not promise to redistribute wealth. It disputed Caesar only in matters of

private conscience. But it introduced new concepts of freedom and exalted the individual. It can be accurately called the first revolution in which the press, in the modern sense, appeared.

After centuries of persecution the new movement was the basis for a new civilization, a new priesthood and a new definition of the sacred and the profane. It retained some of the features of the older Grecian and Roman societies and institutions. It continued a symbiotic relationship with the Jews, from whose temples it had emerged—much as it bound the Old and the New Testaments.

Modern educators do not dwell upon the rise of that new civilization, though its variety, riches and geographical sweep exceeded any ever before known in the West. Its intellectual contributions ranged from inventions to languages, and it created the first non-military organiza-

tion able to bind together persons of different tongues, customs and climes. Its unity was shattered by two inventions, which Macaulay considered most significant: gunpowder and moveable type. One made Europe safe from invasion and capable of conquest; the other provided a tool that created intellectual change.

Within a relatively few years books—other than Bibles—appeared all over Europe.<sup>4</sup> It was not long before the line between the sacred and the profane, in the sense that matters long considered the property of the priests, were being discussed on all levels. In that manner the third great revolution—in which we are still engaged—began.

Our revolution is so large and complex historians describe it in stages, and report each as separate phenomena. In that manner Luther is credited with launching the Reformation. But had he appeared a century earlier, the Vatican agents would have quickly silenced his voice. It was the press that lifted Luther aloft and carried his arguments, in multiple and simultaneous versions, across the landscape so densely that not even death could stop his words.

Luther was astonished at the storm that arose but his most illustrious successor, John Calvin, was not. For in addition to being a great theologian, Calvin was a genius in grasping the significance of the printing press. Protect-

ed in Geneva from the great Catholic powers by the Republic of Berne, Calvin created a ring of printing presses and schools that constituted a propaganda and educational headquarters that rivalled the Vatican.

His presses rolled around the clock, producing a torrent of pamphlets, books, documents in every language including Latin, Greek and Hebrew. His schools taught special courses in language, argument, and even in the arts of espionage and agitation.<sup>5</sup> Geneva was a font of the New Learning, which had several branches. One was Humanist and revived interest in the ancient Greeks and Romans, in the arts and theater. Another was Calvin's which sought to restore an earlier, more austere Christianity bonded to science and commerce. Calvin revived Hebrew in the West, and also the Judeo-Christian belief in a God-directed history in which an Elect leads society toward the millennium. Both branches of the New Learning flowered in directions beyond the control of the clergy or the aristocracy. A torrent of literature and art, argument and propaganda provided cultural and intellectual support for one or the other set of the expanding European paradox, which was as strong in Rome on one end as in Geneva on the other.

Eventually those who could not endure paradox led Europe into the bloody swamp of the Thirty Year's War. That catastrophe ended the purely religious conflicts, and left a residue of cynicism and religious disillusion in a Europe that grew progressively more secular, more political, more commercial—and more divided. The Age of Reason turned toward conquest, scientific investigation and philosophy. By the 18th century skepticism was established as proof of intelligence.

In that age books were no longer a novelty but a necessity. Philosophy replaced theology. The American colonies echoed the trends. Two sets of leaders disputed the British Crown. One set, descended from religious revolutionaries, believed the sweeping powers of the British Parliament to be as blasphemous as the "divine" right of kings. This set wanted to be rid of both the Crown and the Church of England, and to live under a limited government. Another set consisted of lawyers and merchants and politicians who wanted a government under their own control.

Both sets combined in a rebellion that had many novel aspects. The Presbyterian clergy fought against the Church of England while the politicians were against the Crown and aristocracy. Self-described Sons of Liberty, disguised as Indians with blackened faces led mobs against Tory newspapers, destroyed presses, tarred and feathered the proprietors. By the time the issue was joined the rebels controlled all the newspapers. Europeans read their slogans with fascination. *No Established Church! No Aristocracy! No King!*

It may today seem strange, in view of the general antipathy of the general press toward the clergy, that at that time their alliance was an old one. First established by Calvin at Geneva, it was expanded by Knox in Scotland, was a significant feature of the Puritan uprising against Charles I. To the Presbyterian clergy in America, their struggle was a continuation of these earlier movements against the British Crown.

But the political leadership was determined to be rid of

both Crown and clergy, in the name of freedom. What their tactics actually proved, however, was not freedom of the press so much as the proof that its control is crucial in subverting a government—and can subvert even a relatively relaxed, tolerant and popular government.

That lesson was grasped in France, where the Enlightenment had proceeded along the most radical lines. France was then a huge paradox. The most advanced nation in Europe in cultural terms, it was one of the most backward in terms of its political, ecclesiastical and judicial systems. It had a large middle class, many newspapers and books, a lively theater, a famous elite. Its troubles were not as deep as many later historians have claimed. But it was afflicted with a deep national malaise amounting to shame over its imperfections; a condition created largely by two generations of criticism mounted by agitators ranging from Voltaire to Rousseau.

Christianity was openly mocked in France, and even the nobility expressed a belief in equality. Dissent and skepticism were the only accepted attitudes, and by the 1780s Paris began to blossom with revolutionary-oriented newspapers. Most appeared with a legend mocking the censors: *Printed in Peking*. The theater satirized society to the delight of the crown, court and clergy. French literature, however, underwent the most remarkable transformation when pornography appeared.

Pornography was first used against the Church, and then against the Crown. An avalanche of lurid pamphlets appeared against the Queen, Marie Antoinette, and later against King Louis XVI as well, that exceed even our X-rated productions in depravity. This descent of French literature into depths unseen in the West since the days of decadent Rome is seldom mentioned in textbook accounts of the French Revolution. Yet there is little doubt that such debasing literature paved the way for the degradation of people in the days that followed, for pornography denies and degrades the honor and dignity of the individual. The loss of dignity was a deliberate process in the destruction of the French sovereigns, and the shattering of the unifying symbols of the nation.

Newspapers in pre-revolutionary France remain, in this and other examples, stunning proof of the power of the press to degrade individuals while glorifying individuality; to pander to the lowest instincts while at the same time extolling the highest principles of honor and justice. This paradox marked the French press throughout the revolution.

It is now impossible to trace the sources of the funds that created that Paris press and its counterparts throughout France, but subsidies are obvious when publications are distributed without a price. The publications are also worth mention because of their great variety, and innovative techniques. They ranged from cartoons pasted on walls for the illiterate to journals of great elegance, and blended, in some instances, the political with the pornographic. Most revolutionary leaders had their own publications.

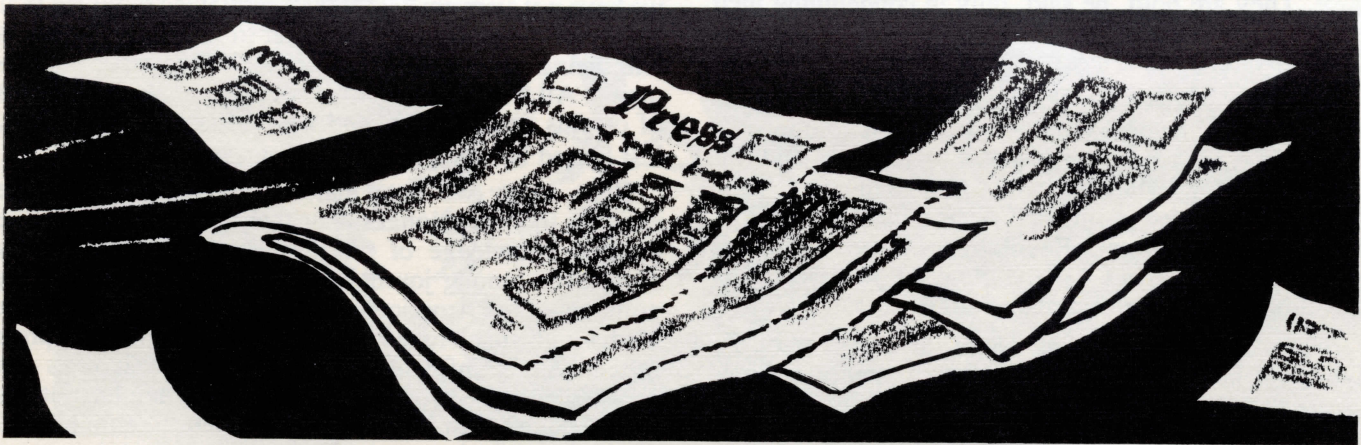
The blizzard of paper left behind by this period contains a mass of contradictions that still befuddle historians. Most settle for the set of explanations that please, and ignore those that contradict. To discover the truth, one must read both sets of the paradox; reality lies

somewhere amid both. But it is clear, even in retrospect, that the French Revolution would not have occurred without the press. The press played the role of Author of the Event. It invented incidents and conceived legends. Most of these are now so deeply imbedded in textbooks—such as the myth that the Bastille was stormed by an enraged populace—that they cannot be removed. They remain as proofs of the power of the press to shape false images that are accepted as reality, once the press is in the control of an unscrupulous coterie.

A striking feature of that coterie is the silence into which it fell after Robespierre came to power. Famous editors and writers, whose voices once rang around the world, went as meekly to the guillotine as had their predecessors in the aristocracy and the clergy. All France was transformed into a huge prison-sweatshop. Wages and prices were frozen; economic realities were ignored and the fabled press of the revolution fawned upon the new masters.

of normality to the nation. The Revolution had been too huge a cataclysm to repair. Its influence, forced underground, echoed through subterranean channels. A new, pedantic Enlightenment rose in Germany, where Teutonic scholars plucked at Christianity in what was termed higher criticism. Its influence spread through France, Britain and reached the United States, and everywhere paved the way for more literal heirs of the French Revolution, like Marx, Engels and their Internationale.

Many have remarked but few actually traced all the concepts of Christianity that the Internationale appropriated, piece by piece. For Divine guidance it substituted an ethereal spirit called Progress, and it replaced Calvin's predestination with "historically inevitable forces." The Elect was denied in favor of Socialist leadership, and the millennium scorned in favor of a perfect society in which everyone would be equal, each would receive in proportion to his contribution, and all restraints would wither away in this life, instead of the next.



Rousseau had said in his description of the perfect State, that "the Citizen is no longer a judge of the post to which the law may expose him. So, if the Prince, the Sovereign, should say to him, it is expedient to the State that you should die, then die he must, since it is on this condition alone that he will till then have lived in safety, and since his life will have been no longer merely the gift of nature but a grant, and a conditional one, from the State."<sup>6</sup> Robespierre and his fellows on the Committee of Public Safety, all faithful pupils of Rousseau, followed this reasoning to the last letter.

Such reasoning put everyone's life at the mercy of dictators—though that aspect of the French Revolution is seldom mentioned by its admirers; neither is its anti-religious nature. For the French were not content to move only against the established church of France. They moved against all religions—Judaic as well as Christian. The Americans had denied political power to the churches. The French went further, and denied churches the right to exist. That crossing of the profane into the sacred did not mean that no religion remained in France, however. For if their forbears had agreed that God gave, and could take, life, the revolutionaries agreed that the State gave, and could take, life. The State, therefore, was their God.

Afterward, Napoleon could restore only a crippled sort

These floating ideas provided basic assumptions for poems, editorials and novels. They amounted to a new secular theology whose proponents competed with the clergy in asserting concern for the poor and downtrodden. To study the 19th century and the early 20th is not, however, to regard the old French Enlightenment with new names so much as to see the revolution reappear with new tactics, an enlarged appeal, on a lower level. Once again, it attracts journalists like Marx and, later, Shaw.

The Bolshevik outbreak, however, is remarkably similar to the French. Once again foreign money appeared, as it did in Paris. Fifty million gold marks moved from Ludendorf's Germany to Lenin in Russia. And Lenin, in an early move, launched *forty-one newspapers*.<sup>7</sup>

Four centuries after Calvin, the Bolsheviks built an enlarged replica of his great propaganda and education headquarters, and called it the Department of Agitation and Propaganda.<sup>8</sup> Like Geneva, it was studded with printing presses, and produced an avalanche of pamphlets, books and documents. Its schools taught special courses in every tongue, produced agents skilled in espionage and propaganda. Like Geneva of old, the Bolsheviks had their Elect chosen, not by God, but by the Party. These leaders substituted for bishops, and the carded members for ministers.

The extent to which this movement has penetrated the

mind of the world has amazed some observers, but such surprise indicates a lack of appreciation for the depths of a religious appeal, and a naivete about the effectiveness of propaganda. Soviet influence in the arts and press of the West in all their aspects is farflung and continuing. The numbers of writers and journalists advanced in reward for their efforts on behalf of the revolution will never be accurately known, but is legion. Many have worked very subtly and achieved enormous eminence. Some journalists stationed in Moscow who later admitted they filed false dispatches to this land have been hailed as heroes—for recanting. That is like admiring Benedict Arnold for changing his mind after the War of Independence. But we cannot be too scornful. Many Russian writers—Gorky, Babel, Fadeyev, Zoschenko, Mandelstam and others—were also fooled, and paid a high price.

What is remarkable today is that the ranks of the deluded continue to increase. We have journalists in the West who so long to be part of the new elite that they will pay any price. Solzhenitsyn has taken oblique notice of these. They are bold, he said, only in condemning their own free societies. Once behind the Curtain they cringe before any authority. He wonders at this terrible paradox.

There are answers to that wonder, though they lie buried beneath the peaks of the third great revolution. To recapitulate, the first of these rose with printing, and was the Reformation, which sought to change the church and the clergy. That led in time to efforts to change religion. By the time of the French Revolution, the movement was against religion. And by the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, it sought to replace religion.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, we today can gauge the progress of the revolution not only by the nations that openly embrace Rousseau's "perfect State" and Lenin's new society, but also by the extent to which remaining nations have replaced religion with worship of the Almighty Government. And in all nations we can measure the role of the press in revolution by the extent to which it has assisted or retarded this trend.

In this assessment, we cannot omit the United States. At nearly every stage in our national history, from the time religious revolutionaries sought refuge in Virginia and Massachusetts, the American press has reflected worldwide revolutionary tides. During the War of Independence the colonial leaders were the *avant garde* of the revolution. In the 19th century American intellectuals cheered the German enlightenment as faithfully as those in Britain or France. Socialism made heavy inroads, both intellectually and in labor ranks, in the United States before World War I. By the time the U.S. entered that conflict, our President was promising the world universal and eternal peace—an earthly goal not even Popes had dared to dream.

President Wilson was against aristocracy, and proposed to usher democracy into the world, by force. At home, American men were compelled into the armed services, while the Administration created an immense propaganda machine using drafted writers, editors, artists and speakers. Wilson's Fourteen Points rivalled Lenin's promises in world appeal. The Calvinist example showed most clearly, however, in their joint use of propaganda; though it is doubtful that either the Bolsheviks or Mr.

Wilson understood the full measure of their imitative-ness, or the deep origins of flood waters they rose.

But it is important that we understand these tides. It is crucial that we realize that a president who does not understand the nature of the revolution will, in his illusions, assist its progress. It is important that we are aware that American journalists have, on many occasions, traded truth for adventure, and are capable of doing so again.

It is important that we understand that this nation is a part of the world, sways to world trends, and is neither immune nor exempt from their consequences. When all central Europe and Mediterranean countries swung toward dictators, we placed our trust in President Roosevelt and forgot traditional safeguards. When the racial theories of the Nazis were loosed, they did not take deep root here, but their manifestations appeared.

Therefore it should be axiomatic that this nation, so important to the world, should know the world better. Yet we have not even analyzed the steps that led to World War II. The propaganda of that war, far from being exposed, is still being produced in novels and newspaper supplements. All wars need to be retroactively analyzed in terms of origins and conduct, and wartime propaganda sifted, lest hatred between peoples becomes permanent.

Even today we note that American press coverage chooses the sensational rather than the reflective, while general knowledge of world events remains woefully scant even among journalists. For that reason, growing numbers of the American people have come to regard the media with suspicion, while it is fair to say that the press in general is influenced by a revolution it does not understand. The promises of successive administrations to end poverty, to make everyone equal, to eliminate all discriminations by manipulating society, to bring peace without effort and security without risk adds up to the ancient promises of religion regarding the next world: a heaven brought to earth by the Great God Government.

Instead of exposing these fallacies the press has, in the main, treated them as realistic promises by responsible statesmen. By helping to spread such absurdities the press of the United States has moved, intellectually, very close to the press of Paris in 1789. As in that revolutionary forerunner, the American press dwells upon the problems of the clergy and often mocks the military. There is a growing seepage of pornography into political coverage. Invented incidents, false quotes and phantom individuals appear under the guise of New Journalism. There is the same feral eagerness to attack prominent persons, and the same claim to lofty ideals while issuing slanders.

Such a press is not impressed by the facts of history nor by the fates of its counterparts in other regions. The press of the United States cheers the advance of government over every sector and all persons, so long as its own privileges remain untouched. Only new competition leading to loss of revenues and jobs will lead the American press to change its ways.

Fortunately the conditions for such a change are at hand. Public discontent with the media is notorious. Both television and movie audiences have dwindled. Newspapers are declining in numbers, circulations and in-

fluence. The New York publishing houses are going the way of the old Hollywood studios, with editors and writers pulling out to form their own production groups. In sharp contrast to these trends, the sales of religious books continue to mount, until they outnumber *all other books combined*. As always, there are those who deplore their quality, but there is little doubt their soaring popularity indicates the liberal elite has misread the needs of the people.

Another phenomenon, of global significance, has also contributed to the situation. It began with the breakout of Solzhenitsyn, whose *Gulag* writings are moving, awesome, and terrible. Other Soviet dissident works are also appearing in the west. For the first time in generations, those who led the forces of destruction in the name of abstract ideals are being forced to listen to their victims. Many of these dissident writers have described how, when they refused in extremes to bow before brute force, they found themselves lifted by a hitherto unsuspected strength. There are some among us who have sneered at this. Others have protested that our society could also produce powerful works, had our writers the benefit—the benefit, mind you—of such searing experiences. They need not worry overmuch; such experiences are still possible for us.

But beyond that, Solzhenitsyn and his comrades are living signs that the great heresy mounted in France in 1789 and in Russia in 1917 is, at last, falling to earth. It is time, therefore, to turn to the other set of facts in the paradox of the press. For if the press is a tool of oppression in most parts of the world today, it is also a great tool for freedom.

For that reason, tyrannical Third World governments have moved to silence their press. The Communists in Italy smother press freedom in that land, and the labor unions and Labour Party of Britain are moving to establish press censorship. If such trends continue the American press may, in the near future, find itself the last free press alive.

In that event, our journalists will have to mature. They will have to speak to the depths of human condition and the heights of the human spirit. For the first time in generations our press will have to rediscover the difference between the sacred and the profane. There are no barriers between the two today: no blasphemies, no insults too gross to print. New voices will be needed and our press will have to define the differences between liars and leaders, perverts and men, between cowards and the brave.

Fortunately this nation teems with talent. We are free as a people to launch and support a new, courageous press. We are able to create unlimited new books, papers, magazines; sponsor new writers, new commentators, new arguments.

We are also fortunate in having a simple yardstick by which the progress of the revolution and the value of the press can be measured. It consists of monitoring the growth of the religion of the State, and the growth of government as contrasted to the private sector. To launch a new press capable of being such a monitor, it is only necessary to bring together informed citizens in concert against the worshippers of the Almighty Government, its political saints, bishops and congregation.

For the first time in centuries, therefore, the revolution can be stripped of its multiple disguises and be seen naked. The tide that has carried the profane into a flood over the sacred and that now threatens a new dark age is at our shores. That is, in a way, appropriate. We harbor refugees from that tide from all parts of the world. No better people nor greater variety could be discovered to staff the last great outpost.

Therefore the complete story of the revolution and the press is, as yet, unfinished. It will be up to us to write its outcome.

<sup>1</sup> *Secrets of the Great Pyramid* by Peter Tompkins, appendix by Stecchini; Harper & Row, New York, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> *Hamlet's Mill* by Giorgia de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, Gambit, 1969; *Stonehenge Decoded* by Gerald S. Hawkins and John B. White, Doubleday, 1965; *Beyond Stonehenge* by Gerald S. Hawkins, Walker, 1975; *Lost Discoveries* by Colin Ronan, McGraw Hill, 1973.

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to the Rev. R. J. Rushdoony, president of Chalcedon, for his elucidation of these observations in his *Notes on World History*, Thoburn Press, 1974. The student may also refer to the writings of the early Church fathers, and especially Augustine's *City of God*.

<sup>4</sup> *The Mediterranean* by Fernand Braudel, Harper & Row, 1973, Vol. II, p. 760 describes, for instance, how Montenegrin peddlers from Venice or Venetian possessions set up printing presses in Danube lands to produce Orthodox literature, and Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 introduced the first printing presses into Salonica and Constantinople with Latin, Greek and Hebrew characters.

<sup>5</sup> *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France* by Robert M. Kingdom, Librairie E. Droz, 1956.

<sup>6</sup> *Unbelief and Revolution* by G. Groen Prinsterer, Lectures VIII and IX, Amsterdam, 1975, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> *Trotsky* by Joel Carmichael, St. Martins, New York, pp. 172-173.

<sup>8</sup> *The New Frontier of War* by William H. Kintner and Joseph Z. Kornfeder, Regnery, 1962, *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> *The Gods of Revolution* by Christopher Dawson, New York University Press, 1972, *passim*.