American Republic. Again, we see Brownson as a forerunner of Pope Leo XIII, attacking such notions as excessive democratization, prevalent false notions of liberty, and the subjection of even moral authority to the power of the state. In a striking passage, Brownson is critical of the phrase in the Declaration of Independence that “Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed” because it seems to assert a purely conventional basis for the state.

It is good that the book includes an index, although it is not thorough enough.

After having read this collection, one cannot help but conclude that Brownson was a truly sagacious, deeply reflective, and remarkable thinker. He is certainly unique among American political thinkers in his ability to intertwine Catholic principles and thought with an analysis of the American political order, and to deftly refer to a constellation of both secular and religious thinkers, both major and lesser-known. His writing is also noteworthy for many important short passages that contain deep wisdom, which is as pertinent in our time as it was in his.

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This is a book on Don Juan Donoso Cortes which many have been long awaiting. Donoso—as he is called in Spain—was born in 1809 in Extremadura to the sounds of the canons of the Peninsular War and died in 1853 in Paris as Spanish Ambassador to the French Court. His life spanned a period in Spanish history marked by the French revolution, the return of absolutism, the development of liberalism and socialism, Spanish civil wars, and the European revolutions of 1848. During this time Donoso pursued his political activities in the service of the Spanish government and contributed a vast literature in his discourses and writings. He was appreciated both in Spain and in the rest of Europe for leaving a heritage of Catholic tradition for contemporary times. But the story of this life is the purpose of the author.

Dr. Herrera is a professor of philosophy at Seton Hall University. He is a medievalist and a perceptive author on medieval thinkers, Spanish mysticism, and contemporary themes. Students of Donoso and the general reader are in debt to Professor Herrera who, with his typical sensitivity, intellectual objectivity, and keen understanding, portrays Donoso in his private and public life and clarifies many obscure and controversial points in his career. In the fore-
word Frederick Wilhelmsen has expressed the view that no contemporary student of Donoso Cortes has captured the fluidity of the life of this unpredictable genius with greater sympathy and profundity than Professor Herrera.

Donoso Cortes has been described as a politician, a journalist, a diplomat, a lay theologian, a political philosopher, a counterrevolutionary, a proponent of dictatorship, a prophet and—of course—a Cassandra. He passed through several periods in his development that were not always understood in the heat of political and theological controversy. The Spanish jurist Alvaro d’Ors might call him a political theologian, and Professor Wilhelmsen also leans in this direction.

In a brief but penetrating preface, Professor Herrera situates Donoso in the context of the first half of the nineteenth century and devotes a chapter to each of Donoso’s appellations. He concludes with an epilogue mirroring the relevance of Donoso for our age. His balanced presentation of Donoso corrects much of the misunderstanding of “el gran Donoso.” The book is not a biography in the strict sense, but rather a story of adventure in the development of the private and public life of Donoso. The author does not gloss over what he considers the foibles and deficiencies in Donoso, but the quixotic genius of Donoso shines through with brilliance. We must remember that Donoso was Spanish and Professor Herrera understands the cultural and religious background from which Donoso came. He draws attention to the astonishment of Hilaire Belloc, who upon hearing the Salve Regina sung in a small Spanish village described it as “harsh, full of battle and agony,” and to Unamuno’s predilection for the “Spanish Christ: livid, squalid, bloody, and ferocious.” For Professor Herrera, Donoso took for granted the notion of life as tragic spectacle, as combat, as the bullring writ large.

Herrera weaves the early life of Donoso with his time as a student and his entry into the turbulence of the Spanish scene. We see the beginning of Donoso’s support for the monarchy and his reflections and piercing criticisms on the situation of his country. While active in the service of the Queen Regent, Maria Cristina, he pursued a number of journalistic endeavors expounding the primacy of the intellect. This was also a period of doctrinaire liberalism for Donoso. Professor Herrera analyzes this time with the aid of Donoso’s articles in El Piloto (1837 and 1839-40), as collected by Father Frederico Suarez in a two-volume edition (1992). Fr. Suarez’s edition sheds light on Donoso’s journalistic attacks on government policies and political factions during this period. Donoso attacked the basic premises of his opponents and was a controversialist worthy of his conquistador ancestors.

His later fame as a Catholic apologist rests on his lengthy and most-often translated work, Essay on Catholicism, Liberalism, and Socialism, but Professor Herrera points out the importance of three of Donoso’s parliamentary discourses: the “Discourse on Dictatorship” (1849), the “Discourse on the General Situation of Europe” (1850), and the “Discourse on Spain” (1850). Indeed, he places Donoso between the elegance of a Cardinal Newman and the vigorous style of a Leon Bloy.
Professor Herrera traces the theme of dictatorship from Donoso’s “Defense of Representative Government” (1837) to the magisterial 1849 discourse on dictatorship, and clarifies certain misinterpretations. The discourse on dictatorship was received resoundingly in all Europe and was the high point of counterrevolutionary political thought at a time when Donoso claimed that liberty was dead and predicted the dire consequences for the future of Europe.

In the last years of his short life, Donoso came to be inspired more and more by his Catholic faith and turned away from his earlier liberal trust in the strength of human intelligence. Donoso, perhaps because of his physical condition, sank to depths of depression in his view of the human condition. But his image, which has been distorted by hostile commentators, has been restored with sympathy and delicacy by the author. Donoso’s personal life became one of asceticism, and he practiced Christian virtues in alleviating the misery of the poor in Paris while continuing his intellectual and diplomatic activities in the service of the Church and his country.

In the last chapters Professor Herrera treats Donoso’s predictions. The most famous of these is his forecast of the eventual triumph of socialism and the constitution of the vast Slavic world state under the aegis of Russia. He also foresaw an eventual symbiosis between socialism and Slavic nationalism. The fame of Donoso, the Cassandra whose predictions were ignored, passed into neglect until rediscovered in times of crisis. In the Epilogue the author briefly attempts to evaluate Donoso’s contribution to political thought, and he indicates the relevance of study of Donoso for the understanding of our times.

The reader of Donoso Cortes will find that the style moves on rapidly with a certain flair. The writing is both scholarly and beautifully nuanced. A brief but adequate bibliography is appended. The format of the text and the color portrait of Donoso on the cover make for an attractive volume. This book is highly recommended for the reader interested in the history of ideas because of its understanding of the social and political problems of Spain and Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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