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## Survivals and new arrivals

*By Thomas Storck*

■ In every period of history the Catholic Church has been assailed by enemies, intellectual enemies certainly, and sometimes physical as well. Thus in the high Middle Ages the Church had to deal with the attacks of Islam as well as of heretical movements, such as the Albigensians of southern France. Then later on, from within the Church herself, came the conciliarist movement, next the revolt of the Protestants, then the Jansenists, and so on to our own time. In 1929 Hilaire Belloc, in a delightful and interesting book, *Survivals and New Arrivals*, undertook to catalog and discuss the movements of his own day which opposed the Faith. The *survivals* are those systems of thought that had passed their prime, survivals from the nineteenth century, for example. And the *new arrivals* are, of course, those new philosophies and ideologies which were just then appearing on the scene, but which looked likely to be the main enemies of the Church in years to come. Belloc's book is still well worth reading at a distance of seventy years. And what I intend to do in this article is not only discuss the book

and note its highlights, but look at the present situation and see what are the Church's main enemies today, as we are about to enter the third millennium of the Christian era.

To begin with, Belloc divides the intellectual enemies of the Faith into three groups. He describes the main enemy thus:

There is, most prominent, what I will call the *Main Opposition* of the moment. Thus in the fourth and fifth centuries Arianism filled the sky. The Faith seemed in peril of death no longer from official and heathen persecution but from internal disruption. The new Heresy supported by the Roman armies and their generals, not only in the east but in Gaul, in Italy, Africa and Spain, seemed an attack too strong for the Church to survive.

Then there are the survivals and new arrivals.

At any moment there lie upon one side of the Main opposition old forms of attack which are gradually leaving the field—I will call them *The Survivals*.

There are, on the other side, new forms of attack barely entering the field. These I will call the *New Arrivals*.

The Survivals exemplify the endless, but always perilous, triumph of the Faith by their defeat and gradual abandonment of the struggle. A just appreciation of them makes one understand

where the weakness of the main attack, which they preceded and in part caused, may lie. The New Arrivals exemplify the truth that the Church will never be at peace, and a just appreciation of them enables us to forecast in some degree the difficulties of to-morrow.<sup>1</sup>

Belloc notes the interest we would have if someone had written such a book in the past so that we might see “the effect upon his time of the failing Puritanical and Jansenist movement, and the advent of the rationalist, which was just beginning to show the tips of its ears!” (p. 19) And with this much as preface, let us look at the survivals, main opposition and new arrivals, as Belloc describes them.

### Belloc’s survivals

The first that he lists, and one which might surprise us to see here, is “the *Biblical* attack: that is, the comparison of Catholic doctrine, morals, and practice, to their disadvantage, with the words of Holy Writ, regarded as a final authority . . .” (p. 42). This, of course, is known to us as Evangelical or Fundamentalist Protestantism, and today is far from a dying survival. But in Belloc’s time it seemed discredited by the defeats it had suffered over Darwinism and other matters, and appeared to be on its way out.

Its disappearance in one area after another has been extending rapidly. Men of my age can remember all Britain and America, you may say, based on Bibliolatry. The older members of its votaries survived in numbers till the other day. Some few linger yet: more in the United States than here (p. 52).

Despite the decline of Evangelical Protestantism in Belloc’s time, he notes that the notion that Christianity is *founded upon* the Bible, interpreted literally and uncritically, still had a great hold upon the popular mind, so that, for example, journalists, even when hostile to any form of Christianity, would simply assume that the Protestant attitude toward the Bible and toward authority in



religion was *the* Christian attitude. There was simply ignorance that the Catholic Church held any other view. Now today this journalistic assumption is still very much with us, certainly in the United States, even among those unaffected by the Evangelical revival. But, of course, since Belloc’s time, and indeed largely in the last thirty years (at least in the United States), there has been a large and powerful Evangelical resurgence.<sup>2</sup> I will speak more of this later.

The next survival Belloc discusses is Materialism. Belloc distinguishes between explicit materialism, “the frankly stated philosophy that there are none save material causes, and that all phenomena called spiritual or moral are functions of matter,” and implicit materialism, “an underlying, unexpressed, conception that material causes explain all things” (pp. 56-57). In this section he is mostly concerned with the former, that is, explicit materialism, and he points out that in his time it was vanishing. People were reluctant to affirm themselves unequivocal materialists, in part because of the movement of science away from the mechanistic certainties of the nineteenth century. And, I would add, because of increasing confusion of thought, men wanted, and want, to have their cake and eat it too, to affirm a vague sort of spirituality while avoiding the conse-

quences and responsibilities that come with acknowledging the existence of God and of the human soul. As we shall see in a bit, the even more degenerate child of materialism is what Belloc calls "the Modern Mind."

The "wealth and power" argument is Belloc's next survival. What he means by it is this: That it is implicitly felt and unconsciously assumed that since Catholic nations were not at the forefront of industrial and commercial or scientific progress, therefore Catholicism is a retrogressive force and is false. Belloc puts it this way:

The Catholic Church is false because nations of Catholic culture have declined steadily in temporal wealth and power as compared with the nations of an anti-Catholic culture, which, in this particular instance, means the Protestant culture. (p. 63)

Now we here in the United States can see this argument, or rather attitude, in operation in our view of Latin America. We like to smugly contrast the virtues we ascribe to ourselves, such as efficiency, civil peace, democracy, and of course, wealth itself, with their presumed opposites south of the border. But as Belloc said,

The man of [the Protestant] culture will note the less cleanly streets of a rival people rather than their greater beauty. If his food is uneatable, that is an insignificant point, whereas if his postal service is good it becomes a test of civilisation. If his trains are punctual and swift and the track better laid than elsewhere these are proofs of leadership: that the cost of transport is excessive becomes a minor part. (p. 71)

But even this, as Belloc states, is not the heart of the matter. For in fact nations rise and fall; at one time the Moslem states were more wealthy and had better armaments than Europe and this did not make their religion true. Moreover, the aim of religion is not to create wealth and power in this world. But since the majority of men are most impressed by what they see with their eyes, and are naturally pleased to be able to think that they and their

way of life is superior, the "wealth and power" argument in Belloc's time still had some force. And it still has force today. Even some Catholics regard Protestant culture as superior to Catholic, because they are in the habit of judging according to Protestant standards. The only remedy for this latter is for Catholics to come to see that the Faith and the culture that the Faith creates are really a unity. But this is not the place to take up this large issue.

The next survival Belloc treats of he calls "the historical argument." By this he means the attempt to discredit the doctrines of the Church by claiming that they were not in fact held by the early Christians, that they were invented or developed gradually out of the life of the Christian community. It is obvious that neither in 1929 nor today do most people have enough historical knowledge to even begin to assess the truth about these questions. And this, of course, makes it that much easier for them to simply accept the propaganda against the Faith that filled Europe and America in 1929 and fills it today. Here is a sample from a *World Almanac* of a few years ago that I have on my shelves. It is from a chart called "Major Christian Denominations: How Do They Differ?" and which includes information on their origins. The difference between their respectful account of the Mormons and what they say about the Catholic Church is instructive. In the case of the Mormons it says their origins lay, "In visions of the Angel Moroni by Joseph Smith, 1827, in New York, in which he received a new revelation on golden tablets: *The Book of Mormon*." But for the Catholic Church, it says: "Traditionally, by Jesus who named St. Peter the 1st Vicar; *historically*, in early Christian proselytizing and the conversion of imperial Rome in the 4th century."<sup>3</sup> Thus the claims of the Church to be the original Christian body established by Christ himself are tossed aside, while Joseph Smith's preposterous visions are accepted at face

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value. This is an example of the casual anti-Catholicism which permeates American and English culture. Although the editors of the almanac could not begin to make a real historical argument against the Church, they have no difficulty about accepting historical assertions that contradict the Catholic faith.

Today, as in Belloc's time, newspapers and popular magazines are full of the half truths about the Church that can shake one whose foundation is not firm. Constant reading of such things has done much damage to the faith of the average Catholic, who is led to believe that he was taken in by the Church in his childhood, and that now such impeccable historical and scholarly sources as *Time*, *Newsweek* and the various television networks have liberated him from his clerically imposed ignorance!

Belloc's last survival is what he calls "scientific negation." He says of it:

This, the last of my series of Survivals, and the most vital of them is very difficult to define. What it is we all appreciate: we still meet it daily. We all know the spirit when we come across it; it is a definite organic thing in the thought of our time, a thing which was triumphant not so long ago and formed indeed, in a generation which has not yet passed away, the Main Opposition to Catholic Truth. (p. 85)

What exactly is this Scientific Negation? Belloc means by this phrase the habit taken from legitimate scientific investigations when they are extended into other areas. The notion, for example, that unless a thing is measured it cannot be understood or the notion that since cause and effect are studied in the natural sciences, therefore the chain of physical cause and effect is unbreakable and thus God (if there is a God) cannot work a miracle. Belloc quotes an amusing passage from a book published in 1883 which illustrates this last point. "Every day adds to the overwhelming accumulation of evidence that [God] though He might, never does interfere

with the operation of natural sequence—called 'laws'" (p. 94).

This sort of argument has even been extended, so that some people, for example, when confronted with credible testimonies that certain miracles have occurred, testimonies that at least bear looking into, reply that this could not possibly be, because all experience proves the unvarying pattern of cause and effect. Of course, the regular pattern of cause and effect could never make *impossible* a variation from that pattern in the future, and furthermore, the notion that cause and effect is unvarying is arrived at only by ignoring the considerable testimony of the human race as to the existence of miracles!

### Belloc's Main Opposition

Next let us look at Belloc's Main Opposition. They have, as he says, "varied astonishingly in character from one age to another" but still have certain traits in common.

The Main Opposition of any movement is characterised by its confidence. It doubts not of its victory, for it takes its truth for granted and therefore its strength. . . . It feels its own success to be part of the nature of things, and, to the certitude of the Catholic (which is Faith) it opposes an equal counter-certitude often so fixed and habitual that it is hardly aware of its own limited character. (pp. 101-102)

Belloc considered three forces to be the Main Opposition of his day. They are: "Nationalism, Anti-Clericalism and what I will call (for so it calls itself) the 'Modern Mind'" (p. 102).

What Belloc means by Nationalism is this, "that *the nation is made an end in itself*." Of course it is not the same as patriotism, which is "that emotion of loyalty towards a tribe or a town, a tiny district, a feudal group and lord, a large nation or a whole vast culture . . ." (p. 108).

Belloc instances many cases in which Nationalism is opposed to the Catholic faith, for example, the exaltation of the nation at the

expense of the universality of the Church or the influence of Nationalism on education, including the establishment of compulsory education, for the most part in schools controlled by the state, and the tendency in times of war for even Catholics to excuse lies and injustices committed by their own governments in pursuit of victory. It is very easy even for a good Catholic to fall into the error of Nationalism, for it does not *seem* like a heresy, only like a firm kind of patriotism. So that this error is as likely to be found in ourselves as in an enemy of the Faith, and thus ought to be the subject of a special scrutiny in our examination of conscience.

The next opponent that Belloc treats of is one that is hardly known "outside the nations of Catholic tradition." It is Anti-Clericalism. It has, Belloc says, "a character of its own, markedly different from all others." What exactly is it? In the first place, Belloc notes, there is a kind of Anti-Clericalism that always exists in Catholic nations and is not necessarily bad, since it is nothing but irritation at "the invasion of the civil province by clerical agency" (p. 122). In other words, since sometimes clerics do stray into the legitimate sphere of the laity, irritation at this is understandable. Belloc avers that St. Louis himself was being anti-clerical in this manner "when he refused the French Bishops the right to seize the goods of excommunicated people." But today Anti-Clericalism of a new kind is present in the "conflict between two incompatible theories of the State—the Catholic and the Neutral, or Lay" (p. 124). Anti-Clericalism has thus grown from its roots in squabbles over the proper bounds of clerical and lay activity into something definitely anti-Catholic, one of the chief opponents of the Church in Belloc's time. And as Belloc notes, this Anti-Clericalism can exist only in Catholic countries, for in countries of Protestant culture the neutral state is already supreme and unchallenged. In Protestant cultures the

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Catholic Church is already regarded as simply one among many sects and private associations which exist by the permission and sufferance of the state authorities. And all too often even Catholics think this way. But "the Catholic Church is not a sect, and will never be able to regard itself as a sect" and moreover the Church "proposes to take in men's minds even more than the place taken by patriotism; to influence the whole of society, not a part of it, and to influence it even more thoroughly than a common language" (p. 125). Anti-Clericalism, then, understands what the claims of the Church mean, and is determined to prevent those claims from being realized in society. In our country the issue hardly arises, but perhaps such Anti-Clericalism is partly responsible for the sad state of the Church in Ireland, France, Spain, Austria and other nominally Catholic nations. I do not know. As an American I share the ignorance of most English-speaking Catholics, for I have never experienced this enemy firsthand. But it is well to be aware of it, especially as we look at the fortunes of the Faith in Europe and Latin America and everywhere Catholicism actually shaped society and formed a culture.

Finally we come to the last of Belloc's Main Opposition, the "Modern Mind." This is an opponent all of us will readily recognize for it is very much with us today. But first let us see what Belloc himself had to say.

The third and by far the most formidable element of Main Opposition to the Faith today, is what I propose to call by its own self-appointed and most misleading title: "*The Modern Mind*." How misleading and false that title is, I will discuss in a moment, premising here, that I adopt it only because terms are necessary to discussion, and this is the admitted and well-known term ready to hand. Were I to invent a new one, I should hamper my argument, for it would be unfamiliar. (p. 141)

And Belloc says further,

We all know the thing. It is the spirit which tells us, on hearing any affirmation or hypothesis not within its own limited experience, that the affirmation or hypothesis must be false. It is the spirit especially prone to take for granted the falsity of an unfamiliar idea if that idea is known to have been familiar in the past. It is the spirit which confuses development in complexity with the growth of good and the process of time with a process of betterment. It is the spirit which appeals, as to a final authority, to whatever has last been said in a matter: "the latest authority." It is the spirit which has lost acquaintance with logical form and is too supine to reason. It is the spirit which lives on bad science and worse history at third hand. (pp. 143-144)

In other words, the "Modern Mind" is the muddled way of thinking of so many opponents of the Church and of any kind of supernatural religion. It is the mind that regards older thinkers as obviously inferior to modern, without reading them or taking the trouble to understand them. Mere passage of time is seen as progress without it ever being asked, "Progress toward what?" Arguments for morality are dismissed by being called Puritanical, without any attempt at counter-argument. It is the kind of mind that considers the term "medieval" equivalent to superstitious and ignorant—thereby only revealing its own ignorance. In its current phase it speaks of "your truth and my truth" or dismisses arguments on behalf of God's existence or of the historical truth of the Gospels, not by counter-arguments, but by assertions such as "You only believe that stuff because you want to" or "You only believe that stuff because of the way you were raised." This is the Modern Mind in operation.

## Our time

We have looked at Belloc's analysis of the ideological enemies of the Church as they existed in 1929, and we have also spoken a bit of the activity of these same ideological enemies today. Now I want to look more closely at our own time.

Today it seems that we face two chief enemies. One is the Evangelical Protestantism that Belloc saw dying. He did not expect its revival quite so soon. This revival is associated in part with the rise of creation science and its quite legitimate criticisms of evolution. Another factor that I think has contributed to its revival is the realization on the part of many Protestant Evangelicals that American culture, which for a long time seemed to belong to them, was no longer theirs. When I was in grade school in public school in the late 50s and early 60s we still had daily prayers and Bible readings. Though ostensibly non-denominational, the atmosphere was decidedly Protestant. As far as I know, there was only one Catholic pupil in my grade school classes. In fifth grade we had the opportunity to earn extra credit by memorizing the 23rd Psalm—in the King James Version, of course! But within ten or fifteen years all this had changed, and now it was becoming an issue whether students could privately read their Bibles without being molested by the school authorities.

All this had something to do with sparking a resistance on the part of Protestants. It may also be the case that the disarray in the Catholic Church has been one of the major factors benefiting Evangelicals, for two reasons. First, because many Evangelical congregations are filled with ex-Catholics, and secondly and more importantly, because many people, looking for a refuge from the insanity and evils of modern life, have not seriously considered the Catholic Church because we seemed to have nothing to offer them. We ourselves appeared

to be in the process of capitulating to every demand of modernity. Moreover in foreign countries, especially Latin America, the rise of Evangelical Protestantism is probably connected with the international financial and cultural influence of the United States.

Evangelical Protestantism has one outstanding positive characteristic: confidence and enthusiasm. And it has one outstanding negative characteristic, and this characteristic is its chief weakness. It attacks for the most part Catholics who know little of theology or philosophy or Church history. The numerous stories being published today of the conversion of Protestants to Catholicism show that, despite the sickly condition of the Church, knowledge of theology or Church history will usually bring someone into Christ's true Church. But among the majority of poorly instructed Catholics the Protestant revival is a serious threat. Whether it can be successfully countered without a sea change in the attitude and actions of the clergy is not entirely clear, but I fear that lay action, no matter how vigorous, will not be a substitute for the necessary action on the part of the authorities.

The Bible-only Christian, whom Belloc saw as a mere survival, is still with us today, and so also is the "Modern Mind." And it is still as hard to define as it was in 1929. By now it has begun to take on new forms, such as post-modernism, a literary and philosophic attitude that not only tends to degrade reason (as modernism sometimes did), but often tends not even to care about ultimate issues.

Moreover, Belloc could not possibly have foreseen how the Church herself would become infected with "Modern Thought." The premises and principles upon which large numbers of Catholics, including priests, base their thinking nowadays are not Catholic. Even if they are not explicitly anti-Catholic they are secular and materialist, leaving no room for the supernatural. Supernatural religion for them seems to be at best a sort of

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icing placed over a basically this-worldly cake. To see what I am talking about, look at nearly any diocesan newspaper and you will find examples galore.

Two particular manifestations of the Modern Mind that seem especially dangerous are feminism and the homosexual movement. Both see the Church as one of the chief obstacles to the achievement of their aims, which increasingly include the elimination of the two God-given sexes and the rendering of mankind completely androgynous. Moreover, feminism has a mystical Pagan side to it, which fits in well with our next enemy.

I have spoken of Belloc's survivals and his main opposition, and I have looked at our own time, but I have not said anything about new arrivals, either Belloc's or ours. Belloc did not foresee how the survivals and main opposition of his time would linger into ours, and even in some cases experience a renewal. But he did accurately predict a new arrival which we ourselves have seen growing before our own eyes. For in one of the most prescient parts of his book, Belloc saw the rise of a new Pagan religion. And I think that in the New Age we can see the fulfillment of that remarkable prophecy. Let us look at some of Belloc's statements to see the similarity between what he predicted and what has in fact happened. Belloc introduces this topic by noting that Paganism has usually

been aware of the great questions upon which the destiny of man hangs, questions such as: Are we responsible to a Supreme Judge, Will we survive after death, etc., even if it has been unable to find solutions for them. But, because of this impotence, of this inability to find truth, Paganism despairs. "Each kind of Paganism came to suffer from horrid gods of its own at last, and these give to each Paganism its particular savour" (p. 177). At this moment the New Age does not see itself as despairing, because it is still young. But it eventually will, and then its "horrid gods" will become more clear and we will see that all along they have been demons. And while the ancient classical Paganism despaired of attaining the good, the new Paganism attempts to deny good and evil. It is an enemy of goodness and beauty.

This new Paganism, Belloc wrote, will form "a sort of moral alliance" with the "Paganism of the East, of Asia; and not only of Asia, but, for that matter, of Africa too." Belloc acknowledges that to his contemporaries such talk sounded "too unlikely to be acceptable" (p. 185). But he was right. The New Age has formed much more than an alliance with Indian and east Asian religions and mysticisms, not to mention Native American. The effect of this on attitudes toward Christian wisdom was also foreseen by Belloc.

In so far as [the new Paganism] progresses it will inevitably breed, as it has already bred in so many, a contempt of Christian tradition and philosophy, as being things at once old-fashioned and puerile. (p. 188)

We who live now have seen this occur on a large scale, as many people have abandoned Catholicism or Protestant Christianity to embrace Eastern mysticism. The mysticism of St. John of the Cross or the metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas are dismissed and despised while everything Eastern is exalted and praised. It has even reached the point that the European and Western tradition is hated

because it is thought to be responsible for most of the ills in the world.<sup>4</sup> Lastly I must quote Belloc on one more enemy. This is Islam. When Belloc wrote, and for some two hundred years before, Muslim states had been retreating before the advance of European powers. The Ottoman Empire was known as the "sick man of Europe" in the late nineteenth century. To Belloc's contemporaries Islam was simply a contemptible peasant superstition that could never again pose a threat to Europe. Belloc knew better. "We shall almost certainly have to reckon with Islam in the near future," he wrote. He even saw the expansion of Islam into sub-Saharan Africa, an expansion that threatens the welfare of the Church there today. "Islam is appreciably spreading its influence further and further into tropical Africa" (p. 191-192).

I will not venture any predictions about the future of Islam and its relations with the Church. The Vatican was able to make a temporary alliance with Islamic states at the UN Cairo conference to defeat some of the most noxious proposals of the Modern Mind. But, if we take Islam seriously and respect the beliefs of its adherents, we must recognize that it is a false religion and an enemy of the Faith. Although Christians are not treated everywhere by Muslims as harshly as they are in Saudi Arabia or the Sudan, nevertheless as long as Islam remains itself, it will be at least a rival to the true Faith. And as in the case of any other rival, vigorous preaching and living of the whole Gospel is ultimately the only weapon we have, whether of defense or offense.

I think that Belloc was able to see much further than most observers of his time mostly because he was able to separate the essential from the accidental and because he followed reason and reality in his thinking, not convention and fashion. As an historian he knew that Islam had been strong in the past and that there was absolutely no reason why



it could not be strong again in the future. And as he looked at our society he saw that with the decline of Christian faith, something else would have to take its place. And so he reached judgments that astounded or puzzled his contemporaries. We must try to have the same clarity and firmness in our thinking, being ready to eschew conventional notions and base our thinking and acting on the Faith, even if the results seem paradoxical or scandalous. For as our times grow more difficult and society grows more hostile, we are going to lose the luxury of an easy identification between ordinary middle-class living and Christian living. Already this is apparent to many Catholics. But we must extend this into every area of life and thought, so that whatever new arrivals may yet come to plague the Catholic people, we will cleave, not to the familiar but to the True, not to what has the appearance of good but to the Good, not to mere sand but to the Rock.

Belloc's *Survivals and New Arrivals* is available from TAN Books, 1-800-437-5876. ■

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 17-18. From now on I will note the page references after each quote. All references are to the first American edition, New York: Macmillan, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Belloc himself allows that such a revival may take place some day. See p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> *The World Almanac and Books of Facts 1982* (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association), c. 1981, p. 358. Emphasis mine.

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, some of those who pose as defenders of Western thought identify it with the Lockean tradition of empiricism, capitalism and technology. But this is rather the deformation of our Western tradition, whose true representative figures are not John Locke or Adam Smith or Thomas Edison, but Aristotle, Vergil, St. Paul and St. Thomas. People turn to the East in part because they do not understand the West. And sometimes the self-proclaimed defenders of the West have contributed to that lack of understanding. See my article, "Why Hispanics Are Not 'Politically Correct'" *New Oxford Review*, vol. 62, no. 9, November 1995.



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