Belloc's martial quality marks him as a writer; it springs from his warrior soul, informed by his vision of what it means to be a man, indeed a Christian soldier. He exemplifies this quality in his three works The Path to Rome, The Cruise of the Nona, and The Four Men, which, though they include no explicit military history of defense of the Faith, unveil a martial quality that stamps all he writes. To assent to a truth is to stand vulnerable for it. This truth for which Belloc, as defender and advocate, stands is the Catholic Faith, matrix of civilization and culture. And indeed he does stand vulnerable as does the Christian soldier, who with fortitude and loyalty, battles for this Mother, of whose womb we have all received. 

Mother Church calls the Christian to battle for her and to die for her. Belloc was granted a special vision of the battle and therefore the mission of the Christian. Because he believed this Mother he fought for her, because he loved her, he died for her. It was his keen vision of mission, of what the particular mission of the Christian soldier is, which inspired in his writings a distinct martial element. Belloc uses martial imagery and diction in many of his descriptions and arguments. Moreover, by his unremitting defense of Catholic culture and civilization and those things which support it and nurture it, he proves himself to be a warrior; this is the specific quality which distinguishes his works because it is the specific quality which marks his soul.

I. CONNECTION BETWEEN THE VOCATION OF THE CHRISTIAN AND THE MARTIAL QUALITY

“I had passed through that great annealing fire of drill which stamps and moulds the French people today, putting too much knowledge and bitterness into their eyes, but a great determination into their gestures and a trained tenacity into the methods of their thought.” - Belloc from “The First Day’s March"

Belloc saw that there are only two forces which are battling on this earth, “the Faith, and its enemies.” If a man views one thing as the bastion of truth, one philosophy which argues with reason, one source which cultivates the souls of men for the good of civilization, he must needs view all outside of that bastion as the enemy of it. So did Belloc view that Catholic Church, her philosophy, and her institutions. In one of his essays Belloc writes:

There is a city, there is a city full, as are all cities, of halt and maim, blind and evil and the rest; but it is the city of God. There are not two such cities on earth. There is one. One thing in this world is different from all others. It has personality and a force. It is recognised, and (when recognised) most evidently loved or hated. It is the Catholic Church. Within that household the human spirit has roof and hearth. Outside it is the night.
In Hac Urbe Solennis
Ver Aeternum Pax Perennis
Et Aeterna Gaudia.

This “city of God” he calls the “household” of “the human spirit,” where alone it receives protection from the forces that would destroy it, where alone it receives nurture by the forces that would enrich it. Household implies a center of nurturing and cultivation as well as protection and defense. Indeed, according to Belloc, this is what the household of the Catholic Church had done throughout the centuries, as matrix of culture and civilization. In his book Europe and the Faith Belloc urges that Europe owes its civilization to the Catholic Faith which has saved her. Europe and the Faith are inseparable, and civilization derives from her.

In the measure man abandons the Faith, he abandons civilization. Because these are inseparable, is it not, then, the case that from the womb of Mother Church, all men have received? All civilization, that is all civiliza which is not in decay, according to Belloc, has derived from the Catholic Church, and, therefore, all men, in the measure they partake of civilization, partake of, or at least receive from, the fruits of this matrix of civilization, the Catholic Church. Those are the themes he considers in his book Europe and the Faith. Civilization, insofar as it is in decay, is so in the measure it has abandoned the Catholic Faith. Therefore, for Belloc, true civilization is that which has preserved the Faith; the rest he would view as a dying civilization.

Belloc beholds the Church with gratitude. In his works one can see a profound sense of reception, of gifts granted and received. At one point in The Path to Rome he remarks about sources and beginnings, while contemplating the sources of rivers, which are themselves such givers. He sees the Church as the Source, established for the nurturance and protection, the light and hope of man towards his proper end. The vision of her graciousness obliges him to defend those goods of which she is the source. Because she is the source, then, of gracious things, indeed of grace, he sees his obligation to defend her, and with this duty enters in the martial quality of the Catholic. For any true Catholic must be a warrior, and Belloc lived up to the vocation, loyal to the radical implications of the Creed.

Belloc battles the modern effort to desacralize civilization, that is, the modern effort to separate civilization from the Faith. Modern man has disregarded the transcendent end of man. In his Comparison to Mr. Wells Outline of History, Belloc writes:

... and soon, with the increasing effect of the Church upon the one hand, the increasing abandonment (outside her boundaries) of all transcendent belief on the other, there will be but two approved camps: The Faith, and its enemies.

It is important to notice the imagery he uses in defining what he regards as a drawing up of the battle lines into two “approved camps.” The terms are indicative of a martial view of the Faith: that man is engaged in a battle whose opponents, with the decomposition of Christian culture, become more and more precisely defined until it is clear as it should be to every Catholic that those opponents are the Catholic Church and everything outside it.

Belloc views the Protestant revolt against the Faith as the beginning of the decomposition of civilization. In the Path to Rome, Belloc, in his characteristically humorous manner, touches on the deeper tragedy of this so-called “Reformation” in a jocular story and song he related about the heretic who failed to offer him coffee:

And my verse was -

“Heretics all, whoever you be,
In Tarbes or Nimes, or over the sea,
You never shall have good words from me.
Caritas non conturbat me.”

If you ask me why I put a Latin line at the end, it was because I had to show that it was a song connected with the Universal Fountain and with European culture, and with all that Heresy combats.

He uses the Latin to connect the song, to link it, to bind it to “the Universal Fountain,” source of grace.
and gracious things, the Catholic Church, universal in its graciousness. He uses the Latin also to show the song is bound with European culture, which is not to be separated from the Faith and its traditions, e.g., the use of Latin. Moreover, he suggests that these two things are opposed by Heresy; he wants his song to be part of “all that Heresy combats.” There is a humorous, yet heroic, and militant, tone in the passage. Beyond this lies the tragedy of a severed unity, and an uprooted civilization.

When he says that the Faith informs culture and civilization, he means that these flow naturally in grace from the expression of a peoples’ adherence to Truth. In the measure that one perceives Truth, Beauty, or Goodness, he can, then, express it in the cultivation of actions which embody these. Belloc sees the Catholic Church as the Truth, Beauty, and Goodness which has thus, given its members the perception in order to embody these truths by cultivating a civilization which is therefore inseparable from her. Without her, civilization could not last, for she has informed it; she is its soul.

Belloc expresses the emotion and vision he had when he describes the picture of a Catholic village, Undervelier, one which had preserved the ancient soul received when the Faith informed the continent. The villagers were at vespers in the little church, all singing in Latin:

... together that very noble good-night and salutation to God which begins - “Te, lucis ante terminum.” My whole mind was taken up and transformed by this collective act, and I saw for a moment the Catholic Church quite plain, and I remembered Europe, and the centuries. Then there left me altogether that attitude of difficulty and combat which, for us others, is always associated with the Faith.

Belloc remarks of the song connected with the Universal Font and the attitude associated with the Faith. It is significant to note his notion of bonds, and binding, connecting, associating oneself with something. The Christian soldier is called to bind himself, and therefore risk himself, for the Faith. In this lies the venture, indeed the adventure, of the true Christian warrior. In binding oneself there results a difficulty and a combat, always associated with the Faith because it is just that, a difficulty and a combat.

The consequences of such a bond are weighty; for when a man binds himself to the Catholic Church he must combat, and, as Belloc says, accept the risk of death. In this adventure and risk is bound the Christian notion of the cross, and of suffering for the Faith and one’s convictions. Belloc explains in The Path to Rome concerning the martial virtues which distinguish her knights:

The Catholic church makes men. By which I do not mean boasters and swaggerers, nor bullies or ignorant fools, who, finding themselves comfortable, think that their comfort will be a boon to others, and attempt (with singular unsucce) to force it on the world; but men, human beings, different from the beasts, capable of firmness and discipline and recognition; accepting death; tenacious.

To be comfortable is to compromise one’s beliefs, for believing implies acting, fighting for the convictions which bind one not merely to believe, but to live in a distinct way. And a man cannot be comfortable if he is truly a warrior, fighting for his convictions.

Thus, Belloc says that from the beginning the Church has nurtured the martial virtues in her loyal sons. As a matrix, she first, (in natural terms), had to establish herself and endure. Belloc, reflecting on Rome, the seat of the Catholic Church and therefore of civilization, awaits the reception of her vision as he marches on pilgrimage in The Path to Rome to the Eternal City. Beholding the vale below, he calls the plain just north of Rome “the arena upon which were first fought out the chief destinies of the world.” Before the Church was, these destinies were determined, so that forth from this battle sprang the roots of the City, stronghold of the Church, and matrix of our civilization:

Was it in so small a space that all the legends of one’s childhood were acted? Was the defense of the bridge against so neighboring and petty an alliance? Were they peasants of a group of huts that handed down the great inheritance of discipline, and made an iron channel whereby, even to us, the antique virtues could descend as a living memory? It must be so; for the villages and ruins in one landscape comprised all the first genera-
tions of the history of Rome. The stones we admire, the large spirit of the lost expression came from that rough village and sprang from the broils of that one plain; Rome was most vigorous before it could speak.\textsuperscript{10}

Rome was most vigorous from her conception, vigorous, and fertile; full of life and life-giving. She could be none other, as it was her call to become matrix, the womb whence sprang civilization. Belloc connects this vigor, vitality, and fertility of Rome with its fruits, “the great inheritance of discipline”: and the “antique virtues,” descending “as a living memory.” The implications are important: that Rome is a source, potent and fruitful, a life-giver. Indeed Belloc would see her (that is, all that she symbolizes or contains) as the only source of life and fertility, “the household of the human spirit . . . Outside it is the night,” a wasteland, arid and barren.

He regards her fruits, her antique virtues, to be enduring as a living memory. Her sons possess the martial virtues of a race which was victorious in deciding the chief destinies of the world: “I ate and drank in a reveller,” he continues, “still wondering, and then lay down beneath the shade of a little tree that stood alone upon that edge of a new world.”\textsuperscript{11} Out of that high Graeco-Roman civilization, which prepared the way, the Christian world sprang. Belloc views this new world as the cradle of civilization, and of all that has the potency to give life. To the degree in which thought and belief are divorced from this font, to the degree there is compromise and comfort, to the degree there is no battle because there is no bond, in that measure is there, for civilization and for man, doom. The solution Belloc presents with tenacity, honor, and loyalty:

The Catholic Church will have no philosophies. She will permit no com forts; the cry of the martyrs is in her far voice; her eyes that see beyond the world present us heaven and hell to the confusion of our human reconciliations, our happy blending of good and evil things.

By the Lord! I begin to think this intimate religion as tragic as a great love.\textsuperscript{12}

The antique virtues are courage, honor, loyalty, tenacity. To bind oneself out of love means battle; and not even life is greater than fidelity to this bond. The Church teaches her sons not to be reconcilers, as if truth could be compromised. She presents us “heaven and hell to the confusion of our human reconciliations.” The modern world is full of the diplomat. It prefers deception and illusion for the sake of comfort. Belloc, seeing this, lauds the martial man who preserves his honor, and the antique virtues which the martial man hold to. Recognizing these two types of men, Belloc comments on the modern world and on its opponent, the Catholic Church. Willing to deceive and be deceived, modern man is confounded in his reconciliations, his “happy blending of good and evil things.” Tenacious and immovable, the Christian soldier opposes its confusion, comforts, and lies. The memory of the antique virtue endures; the result is the martial vision of a loyal son, comfortable in no thing, battling for “The Thing,” the Catholic Church, the embodied, combative Faith, the Ecclesia Militans in communion with the whole Church.

Belloc argues that the root of all human conflicts is theological, a truth received from his beloved Cardinal Manning; for which reason he does not separate Europe from the Faith, nor does he, as he says of Manning, admit “the possibility of compromise between Catholic and non-Catholic society. He perceived the necessary conflict and gloried in it.”\textsuperscript{13} By the desacralization of civilization, Belloc means that modern man would exalt himself and Science above God and the Faith, that he would “[become] master of the Earth and [supplant] Heaven,”\textsuperscript{14} that he would divorce Europe from the Faith.

In \textit{The Cruise of the Nona} Belloc discusses the philosophical history after the shipwreck of Christendom in the sixteenth century. Writing in 1925, he says that of rationalism, skepticism, and pantheism, the one most potent and tenacious is pantheism, against which stands the traditional Catholic orthodoxy. He further comments on the clarity of the two camps on the Continent:

Outside England every one is aware of the Catholic Church; two great armies face each other, and the issue is doubtful. All instructed Europe sees a great duel set between the Catholic Church and its opponent. All instructed Europe sees that this duel is taking the form of anti-Catholic laws and of proposals of laws upon the one side, and upon the other of growing Catholic social power.\textsuperscript{15}

The battle is not just seen by the Catholic, nor is the struggle merely an issue of his day and ephemeral. Since the “shipwreck” things have been moving into “two approved camps” and the final battle has yet to come.

Belloc reveals the warrior he is in his criticism of
the Catholic who, rather than take the offensive, would apologize before his supposed superior. Belloc admonishes: assault the enemy, you who have the tradition of Europe, “the whole momentum of civilization, who have humour and common sense as the products of faith,” to hurl at your contradictors:

... it is monstrous that the sound, admitted, fixed, concluded thing, the heritage of the human race, should be put on its defense, and that any assault on it should be supported by a predisposition to accept any conclusion so long as it be novel.17

Herein is the mark of a true knight, rousing his troops from their lethargy and timidity, mustering them for conflict. The tone reveals vigor, courage, a sense of ultimate confrontations and urgency; he concludes with a humorous smile: “in battle you must be fierce. The louder the victim’s cries the nearer you are to victory.”18 With his usual humour, Belloc encourages a return from retreat and the fierce assault of the enemy.

It might seem that Belloc acts against the traditional understanding that the Christian should turn the other cheek, or that he should not be a man of strife and conflict. Moreover, it would seem that the terms “Christian” and “warrior” are opposed. The idea of the Cross suggests that men should accept with resignation their sufferings and the wrongs done against them. But warrior implies a vocation to battle and destroy one’s enemies.

But this kind of a view would make the Christian into a pacifist. It would exalt a false peace and false unity, over truth and the right. Christ did say for a man to turn the other cheek, but not at those times when he is obligated to speak the truth courageously in defense of Truth. Belloc sees the tendency of the modern world to prefer comfort to truth. Christ said that He came to bring the sword not to defend comfort, but to attack it and all its false illusions and absorptions. The question is what is the higher good, or whether the one is even a good at all, and not rather a confounding of the souls of men.

Moreover, the Cross does mean that the Christian should accept his sufferings with resignation, but the sufferings meant here are the attacks and persecutions which come as a result of his championing of the Faith, his living, preaching, and dying for the Faith. The Christian is called to resign himself with the charity of Christ to the persecutions received due to his zeal for his convictions. Christ showed no tolerance for the hypocrisy of the pharisees, nor should the Christian show tolerance for the lies of the world. One must distinguish between love and tolerance of the sinner, and hatred and intolerance for the sin.

Belloc realizes the vocation of the Christian to champion the Faith, to live one’s whole life for it because it is the only salvation of men. He believes there is an intimate connection between the vocation of the Christian and the martial character which should stamp all loyal sons of the Church. And this is why he speaks of the antique virtues which Mother Church instills into her sons. There are two forces, the Faith and its enemies; thus, the Christian is called to a martial life, since the very life of the Church is a battle against those physical and spiritual forces which would destroy this font of grace and salvation.

II. BELLOC’S DEFENSE OF THE SACRAMENTAL IMAGINATION AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH

“And I know that youth is a gift of God, and like all His gifts, carries no regret. They alone shall be young, really young, whom He has chosen never to survive their youth.”

-- Georges Bernanos, The Diary of a Country Priest

The Catholic Faith engenders that understanding, that limpid vision which alone is consonant to the nature of man, that is man, soul and body. It possesses, not only an outlook on historical contingencies, but also a perception of the created world, and the intimate things, which are bound up with the understanding of what it means to be a man. In other words, it has an incarnational sense about the little intimacies, and the precious but precarious things which touch the heart of a man. Only a philosophy which understands what it is to be a man, indeed, only a theology whose God became a man, could possess this incarnational and sacramental sense of life.
By incarnational or sacramental sense of life is meant the understanding that through the body of things one can perceive a sign of higher or interior realities, which are unseen, sometimes mysterious, and often beyond the natural. In essence, the sacramental sense is the understanding that the sensible world mediates to a vision of the suprasensible, which is embodied in ordinary experience. As a fruit of the Catholic Faith and culture, this sacramental imagination marks a true Catholic vision of life. Belloc is a man wholly informed by this vision and animated by a keen sacramental imagination. Insofar as this quality, which distinguishes the true Catholic mind, is essential to Catholic culture and the right perception of the meaning of life and the nature of man, Belloc possesses and nurtures it in his writings. His reflections, judgments, descriptions, and arguments are informed by a sacramental sense of life; he advocates and champions this genuinely Catholic vision rooted in the Providence of God and His Bride on earth, Mother Church.

Belloc writes in the Path to Rome of the visions or revelations granted him. To grasp Belloc’s gift of perception, his sacramental sense, one must understand his sense of mediation: that bodily things lead to the perception of deeper realities, that they embody or point to supernatural, spiritual realities. In one of his most intense, powerful descriptions, he reveals the sacramental quality. He has just arrived on the last ridge of the Jura mountain range, and he beholds the Alps beyond the vast valley, looming “remote, remote from the world,” as if “a steadfast legion,” and glittering “as though with the armour of the immovable armies of Heaven.” Upon beholding this vast array, Belloc remarks of the vision:

... there came to me one of those great revelations which betray to us suddenly the higher things and stand afterwards firm in our minds. There, on this upper meadow, where so far I had felt nothing but the ordinary gladness of the Summit, I had a vision. What was it I saw? If you think I saw this or that, and if you think I am inventing the words, you know nothing of men. I saw between the branches of the trees in front of me a sight in the sky that made me stop breathing, just as great danger at sea, or great surprise in love, or a great deliverance will make a man stop breathing. I saw something I had known in the West as a boy, something I had never seen so grandly discovered as was this. In between the branches of the trees was a great promise of unexpected lights beyond.20

He has not yet told what was the sight. He begins rather with what it has granted him. When such a man has a vision it is not just of what he sees, but of what he has been granted to see, as Belloc would say, by the Presences which dwell in that place. And thus, he says, were betrayed to him the higher things which endure after the passing of even those, his fierce Alps.

With his words he binds what it means to be man possessing a sacramental vision of life; for with the statement “if you think I saw this or that, and if you think I am inventing the words, you know nothing of men” he is commenting on the nature of man: he is saying that he knows something of men who know that it is of the most intimate and unexpressed motions of the soul to glimpse a shimmer of Heaven even upon this “little passage through the daylight.” In other words, for him who has eyes to see, let him remember such memories, given in vision:

overshadowed by that air wherewith the Creator blesses childhood, lending to everything an active flavour of the divine; which is in three things, Clarity, Magnitude, and Multiplicity of strong emotion.21

For it is in one’s childhood when most of all his vision pierces through to those presences which are more real than the visible; and it is childhood man must return to lest he perish. Belloc remarks of the vision that it was something he knew “in the West as a boy,” that youthful time whence one perceives with clarity, magnitude, and plentitude of emotion. The memory of such clarity and spaciousness helps a man to preserve that special quality of childhood by which little ones can see, which is, purity. If the veil is purific’d of the stains which mar it, then can the beholder see with more clarity what is beyond it. Belloc is suggesting that, in this way, a man beholds what is beyond the veil of this world if he possesses purity; for indeed, he looks through the veil of his soul: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

In the measure that a man returns to his childhood, he can perceive the “unexpected lights beyond,” which light is the special quality transfiguring the incarnate that lends “to everything an active flavour of the divine.” Thus a man may show the proper awe due even to the created world. Only a sacramental sense of life allows one to perceive the body of created things as good. For indeed the value and awfulness of created things mediates to higher things, perpetual things. And so Bel-
loc can say of those Alps, upon his first vision of them:

Their sharp steadfastness and their clean uplifted lines compelled my adoration. Up there, the sky above and below them, part of the sky, but part of us, the great peaks made communion between that homing creeping part of me which loves vineyards and dances and a slow movement among the pastures, and that other part which is only properly at home in Heaven. I say that this kind of description is useless, and that it is better to address prayers to such things than to attempt to interpret them for others.22

That those peaks could compel adoration, that description becomes useless, making it “better to address prayers to such things,” reveals the quality of the created by which they mediate a fuller life from God. It is important to understand how this sacramental vision of Belloc’s is bound intimately to the Catholic Faith and how he, therefore, implicitly and with potent evocations, defends such a vision, thereby showing himself a true Christian warrior. Belloc realized that the Catholic sacramental vision is rooted in the providence of God and His Bride on earth, Mother Church. This is so because Christ became Incarnate, and therefore became the chief Mediator. Moreover He bestowed upon men the Church as Mediatrix on earth.

Christ, through his Incarnation, became the perfect Mediator between God and man, who had lost communion with Him. Christ restored this communion by becoming Himself the communion of God with man. First, in the sacramental life of the Holy Church, manifest is God’s Providence, by which communion is restored. Second, in the sacramental imagination of the Holy Church, manifest is God’s Providence, by which man is elevated by a vision of the eternal world through the created. For in His loving Providence He has willed none other than the communion of His creation with Himself.

In this last passage Belloc has used the sight of the Alps to make a larger point about mediators and the communion of men with God. For him the Alps are a sacrament, in the sense that they mysteriously mediate between man, possessing a body, who, therefore, “loves vineyards and dances and a slow movement among pastures,” and man, possessing a spirit, who, therefore, is only properly at home in Heaven.” Somehow those great peaks “made communion” between the spiritual and the bodily, those peaks which are, he says, “part of the sky,” but also, “part of us.” This is the mystery of a sacrament and, indeed, a sacramental imagination which can perceive, within the bodily, also signs of the divine beyond, yet present to the world.

Because of his sacramental understanding, Belloc reveals in his works a great capacity for gratitude, and the proper and due reverence for the created world. Indeed, it is its goodness and preciousness that compels gratitude. There is a special way in which the sacramental sense of life fosters a capacity for gratitude. For through it one is aware, as is Belloc, not only of being granted revelations of the supernatural by which one can know God and His graciousness, but also of being granted mediation toward the supernatural by which one may more fully love God. Belloc makes the connection between his prayer, addressed in gratitude upon the sight of the peaks, and gracious things, such as the Alps. These grand visions, which are a kind of grace, in the sense that they reveal eternal verities, disclose our religion: “humility, the fear of death, the terror of height and of distance, the glory of God ...”23 He writes in the same description:

These, the great Alps, seen thus, link one in some way to one’s immortality. Nor is it possible to convey, or even to suggest, those few fifty miles, and those few thousand feet; there is something more. Let me put it thus: that from the height of Weissenstein I saw, as it were, my religion. I mean, humility, the fear of death, the error of height and of distance, the glory of God, the infinite potentiality of reception whence springs that divine thirst of the soul; my aspiration also towards completion, and my confidence in the dual destiny. For I know that we laughers have a gross cousinship with the most high, and it is the this contrast and perpetual quarrel which feeds a spring of merriment in the soul of a sane man.24
At last Belloc unveils of what his vision was: “from the heights of Weissenstein I saw, as it were, my religion.” First he notes the quality of those mountains by which their beholding “link[s]” one to this immortality; they possess that sacramental quality which leads the vivid soul beyond the temporal to the eternal. So Belloc would later write in The Four Men that inasmuch as one attaches his human loves which perish to the changeless, so would they “mature and broaden” and so would the objects of that love assume “the character of enduring things.”

Thus one can see the link which permits even those things which vanish to stand for, and lead to, lasting realities, which they themselves are not. It is a mystery how our human loves which are so deeply a part of us, which nourish us and grant us visions, cannot be possessed, nor do they endure, and yet these are what reveal to us the divine beyond this mortal world, from which source we are drawn there to our true patria of enduring freshness, variety, and plenitude. What is the quality in the mortal world that leads man forth to this revelation? A sacramental imagination which allows him to perceive the mystery within the mortal world inspires Belloc to say that “the great Alps, seen thus, link one in some way to his immortality.”

Within the perishing there is a quality which unveils the enduring. Thus Belloc beholds his religion at the sight of the Alps. This sacramental quality by which the created leads to the divine, is a grace and therefore deserving of a prayer. God makes use of the physical order through which He grants graces, or disposes the soul for its further sanctification. So, too, can one consider these visions and revelations a grace, which leads the soul to further sanctification by conceding more intimate communion with the sacred invisible. Belloc calls the visions received at the sight of Weissenstein a part of his religion: they reflect the proper relationship between the soul and God, and they draw the soul to communion with the divine; indeed, one may term this communion contemplation: “the infinite potentiality of reception whence springs that divine thirst of the soul; my aspiration also towards completion.”

Herein lies an intimate part of the Faith which Belloc beholds at the sight of the peaks. He calls it the “infinite potentiality of reception whence springs that divine thirst of the soul.” He is speaking of contemplation which unites one to God. Contemplation is the highest form of prayer in which God acts wholly, and the soul receives wholly. Man knows that he does not have an infinite capacity to unite himself to God, but he does know that he has an infinite potentiality to receive, because God can infinitely grant; thus Belloc calls it “the infinite potentiality of reception.” Moreover, God can increase without limit the capacity of a vessel to receive. Though man be limited, it is his capacity for reception, and his confidence in the abundance of God’s graciousness “whence springs that divine thirst of the soul.” To the degree he is not fulfilled he depends upon the divine graciousness and awaits its reception, for it alone can complete him.

For Belloc, these sacraments are indications not only of an enduring world, but of an enduring battle, signs not only of another world, but of another battle, both unseen, except with the eyes of Faith. If each of these sacraments, or signs, indicates a higher reality, would it not be advantageous for a man like Belloc, clear and undeluded about the battle, to use these signs to convey that clarity of perception. Belloc beheld within these sacramentals of nature a sign of conflict, defense, assault, that is, of battle. His words and his imagery are clear; something about the created world compels a vision of combat. He remarks of the Alps:

They were as distant as the little upper clouds of summer, as fine and tenuous; but in their reflection and in their quality as it were of weapons (like spears and shields of an unknown array) they occupied the sky with a sublime invasion...

Earlier he calls them “a steadfast legion,” glittering “as though with the armour of the immovable armies of heaven.” He uses the term “unknown” array, as if to
indicate something unseen by man, or otherworldly. He also compares them to the “immovable,” in the sense of undaunted and steadfast “armies of Heaven,” the angelic hosts.

A martial element enters again with Belloc’s sacramental vision of life. Those things in view tell him of higher realities, but also of higher combats, combats more ultimate. Thus, he includes the angelic role in the battle over all of creation, because their role is significant to us (and the victory of the Church’s battle.) In dealing with them he writes, often, in a humorous way, and yet with certitude about the angelic role of mediation: “All you that have loved passionately and have torn your hearts asunder in disillusions, do not imagine that things broken cannot be mended by the good angels.” Belloc refers to them in various contexts, individually, and in groups and in relation to things both trifling and weighty. In other words, for Belloc, they are not mere ornaments, but true intercessors. They are incarnated by the particular role and mission they have. All angelic mediation, ultimately is linked with the battle for the souls of men. It is significant that Belloc includes their intercession; they are an intimate part of the Faith, mediators for the souls of men in the battle to destroy the Church, as a well-instructed Catholic would know (and should!)

In his comparison of the Alps to the Heavenly hosts, the passage evokes more than a simple effort to describe the peaks by comparing them to something of which their view reminds him; it would seem, especially because of the insert he makes parenthetically, that he wants to use this imagery precisely because, to him, these mountains are a sacramental of an invisible warfare, which, like the mountains, has the quality of sublimity, steadfastness, distance, vastness, and invasion.

Belloc uses martial imagery also in reference to journeying on the sea. Here it is even more significant that he chooses to refer to the sea, which he will later call “the common sacrament of this world,” in martial terms. For if he views it with such loftiness, to go even so far as to call it “the common sacrament,” one must see those things which he considers most significant in its character as pertaining to his vision of life and its varied experiences. In other words, that Belloc calls the sea a sacrament reveals something particular about his view of man’s passage through life, and the meaning of it. The sea is a sacrament for Belloc, an eternal sign revealing the brief passage of the soul through time; for it grants revelations to the one who would venture to approach that vast teacher of men:

And as there is a concealment of reality at sea, corresponding to the concealment of reality from our experience in human life, so also at sea there is occasionally vision, corresponding to that occasional vision which you also have in human life: but vision is much rarer than the concealment of reality ... I say that the sea is in all things the teacher of men.

He notes the correspondence between the experiences of men within their lives and the experiences of the man at sea. Belloc writes in The Cruise of the Nona that the sailing of a boat on the sea is “very much what happens to the soul of a man in a larger way.” The things which not only happen to a man, but also, by their happening, form him, teach him, but especially grant him visions, are like to the tediums, discoveries, emotions, adventures, perils, visions and finally the repose granted at sea. He concludes that “in all things” is the sea the teacher of men. He sees her as the one natural physical reality which has the greater capacity to mediate, as the teacher and guide of the sailorman, toward “a further shore.”

Two things are important here: the notion of a shore beyond, which can be reached by some sort of mediation; and the notion of the sailorman, who needs to be docile in order to perceive the message of the sea. Belloc calls her the “messenger of the Divine.” But one must be receptive to the gifts she offers. In his notion of the sailorman, there are evocations of the child, with the purity to see, and of the contemplative, with the “infinite potentiality of reception.” On the sea, a sailorman needs purity, in order to see, and the capacity for reception. Belloc links implicitly the notion of the sailorman with the need for spiritual childhood, and the capacity for reception and gratitude. He later speaks of a kindred soul, another sailorman, and sets him apart when he reflects that he wishes he could “talk with him again about ... the souls of sailormen.” The words evoke a special sense that the soul of the sailorman is distinct and to be revered. The quality of soul of which he ponders is that of spiritual childhood and the capacity to receive visions. In The Cruise of the Nona, Belloc laments how rare is vision, as he also seems to lament in this last passage, how rare are the souls of true sailormen. Of the mediation of the sea, perceived by the rare soul of the childlike sailorman, Belloc writes:
For the divine reveals itself in a special multiplicity, in an infinite variety. All that there is in colour and in music, and in line and in affection, and to these added other raptures innumerable, such as we know not of nor can conceive - that is to be at last our beatitude: that is the fulness of being. In childhood our innocence permits us some little glimpse of such things; but with the passage of the years they are lost altogether. The light in the lantern goes out and the living thing within us fails, and is stupefied, and dies.36

Here he speaks as if all of life were a sacrament in which “the divine reveals itself.” But only childlike eyes can perceive through to glimpse the revelation, and finally, to possess the “raptures innumerable, such as we know not of nor can conceive”; echo of Our Lord’s words, these raptures refer to the further shore, which is “our beatitude.” Mediation is granted, but the child alone perceives it:

... consider this decay of heaven within ourselves as the maturity of our manhood develops. The more we are of this world and the more we know of it, the further are we drifting from the shores of the Blessed.37

Manhood he considers the contagion of the world in which there is a “decay of heaven” and an exaltation of this world. He who would (as a worldling) mature, and attach himself to the world, drifts “from the shores of the Blessed.” Again, Belloc implicitly recalls spiritual childhood as the means to the further shore. With manhood, heaven decays within the soul. In order for the sea to mediate towards the further shore, one must submit to the guidance. Perhaps this is the quality of the “souls of sailormen”, who possess the vision which the sea mediates because they have humility and spiritual childhood. A vividly received mediation presupposes childlike submission; grace can only complete its act with a certain cooperation of freedom.

Belloc uses the imagery of the sea, and “the shores of the Blessed.” The sea is the mediator, “the sea provides visions, darknesses, revelations”38; the shore of the Blessed is the repose of the soul in the Divine whence it came. The mediator guides, teaches, reveals, reconciles. The sacrament of the sea mediates in all these ways, as a mediator between the soul and its goal at the shore beyond. The sea removes the soul from the shore.

perficality, corruption, and interruptions of the present shore. Time spent on the sea is “more continuous; it is more part of the breathing of the world; less mechanical and divided.”39 Thus is that time more present to the reality of the further shore which, in fact, is our completion and more real, (in the sense that it is not mutable), than the visible world:

Now at sea there is no advocacy. We are free from that most noisome form of falsehood which corrupts the very inward of the soul. Truth is one of the great gifts of the sea ... Everywhere the sea is a teacher of truth. I am not sure that the best thing I find in sailing is not this salt of reality.40

The sea is something apart, presenting to us truth and reality. Indeed, the sea forces the sailorman to face “this salt of reality” whether he will it or no. But if the sea is apart, so too must be the sailorman who would receive “the great gifts of the sea.” The sea is the teacher and mediator for the one who would detach himself from this world’s weariness, “which corrupts the very inward of the soul.” It is this corruption, this “decay of heaven,” which shows itself in the withered and pusillanimous spirit of modern man. Belloc inveighs against the character of modern man which shrivels the youthful soul, so capacious and pure. The problem with modern man is that he has lost his spiritual childhood; and with this loss he has not merely corrupted childhood, including spiritual childhood, but hates it. Herein lies a particular and momentous part of the battle: the battle over the souls of children.

Belloc reveals a clear perception of the loss of the special sense of childhood. He champions it in his words about the clarity and magnanimity of the child, and in his evocations about spiritual childhood when he writes of the souls of sailormen. Speaking of a man whom he recognized to have a kindred soul, “that strongest-souled and most sincere of men, who desired and did good all his life,”41 Belloc writes:

It is the meeting with such men, and the comparison of their public label with their true function, of their false renown or lack of renown with their certain standing in the eyes of their Maker, which lead all wise men to a perfect contempt for the modern world. Does anyone remember him now of those who are reading this? Perhaps one or two, perhaps no one. He loved the poor: he understood the sea. He was a brother and a support to sailing-men.42
Belloc has contempt for the confusion, deception, and darkness of the modern world. It is clear where his heart lies, what he sees as of moment to men. This man Reynolds had a “certain standing in the eyes of [his] Maker” and “he understood the sea.” For Belloc, there is nothing more -- to be able to stand upright and without shame before his God, and to possess the childlike soul of a sailorman, which has clarity of vision, magnanimity of soul, and plenteous of emotion.

He concludes, about Reynolds, with great pathos and longing:

As for those who are too good for us, or too wise for us, why, the sooner they are out of it the better for them. And so it is the better with Reynolds ... But I wish that I could come across him again in this world, somewhere at the meeting of sea and land, and talk with him again about the schools of fishes, and the labours of those who seek them along our shores, and the souls of sailormen.43

With the loftiness of poetry, Belloc here intones a note of dolor. He sees that there are those men “apart from us others,” exiles from a shore unseen by the multitude of men, a shore unseen by us who are less wise, less good, and who have not yet returned to our childhood. Such would be a Reynolds, who possesses the soul of the sailorman, as an exile from the shore beyond, dolorous at the vision of its loss.

Belloc saw the kindred soul in Reynolds, as he saw it, also, in Homer. Homer, too, wrote of exile and of the dolor of men. Belloc echoes his poetry, as he recalls of the sea:

It has rendered remote the cares of and the wastes of the land; for of all creatures that move and breathe upon the earth, we of mankind are the fullest of sorrow.44

Belloc reveals his own melancholy in the pathos of these lines. For those men apart, he writes, regarding the desolation of this world, “the sooner they are out of it the better for them.” The sea has, for Belloc, rendered remote the waste and confusion of the modern world; that is because Belloc, too, is an exile. It cannot be his home in this jumble and darkness of a world. He asks concerning Reynolds: “Does any one remember him now? ... Perhaps one or two, perhaps no one.”

For, like Belloc, Reynolds was not of this world, rather a part of another: perceiving it, desiring it, exiled from it. Thus with recognition and communion, Belloc writes of another sailorman: “In all things this man was worthy and a friend, for I could see in his eyes that he suffered exile.”45

That Belloc is not just a warrior, but a “Christian” warrior explains his special concern and defense of the values of a truly Christian man. Indeed, Belloc is a warrior and champion, but even more significant is what he is fighting for. In these three books, The Four Men, The Path to Rome, and The Cruise of the Nona, one sees Belloc’s reflections and convictions, his criticisms and dolors, and those things which he sees as of moment to men. Underlying each of these is his Catholicity, his bond to the Faith, a bond which entails and implies risk and battle.

Belloc’s particular battle lies in the concerns and convictions which he writes about, either directly, or through evocation. Thus does he defend the soul of childhood, and the special sense of exile that all men should learn, and which is evoked in his words of the visions of men exiled. Moreover, he writes with a profound sacramental imagination which helps one to discover in the temporal, eternal verities. Belloc acts on his convictions, writing of the evils invading the world, and of the goods to be fostered. He sees the Catholic Church, and the things which it has cultivated throughout the centuries, as the Mother and source to be defended.

In the struggle, as one lives his convictions and battles for the truth, the sea will intercede as a beacon of light to the further shore. Belloc returns to the sea as a source of truth and mediation. He exemplifies the mediation of the sea for the sailorman and exile upon his boat:

...a home and a companion, and at the same time a genius that takes you from place to place and, what is much more, a good angel, revealing unexpected things, and a comforter and an introducer to the Infinite Verities...46

The boat is like the good angel who would lead her mate to the Infinite Verities at sea. She, too, is a mediatrix: as the boat is like to the moon, so is the sea like to the sun -- both are lights and illuminators, both are beacons of disclosure. The little boat, in this world, but not of it, leads the sailorman across the revelations of the sea. Note that Belloc calls his companion a “comforter,” as if, while in introducing and illuminating, she
also gives strength and consolation.

Belloc later explains in what way a mediator can console. He returns to the sea, the one natural physical reality which has the greatest capacity to mediate, because it reflects more precisely the passage of man through time. He says of it:

The sea is the consolation of this our day, as it has been the consolation of the centuries. It is the companion and the receiver of men. It has moods for them to fill the storehouse of the mind, perils for trial, or even for an ending, and calms for the good emblem of death. There, on the sea, is a man nearest to his own making, and in communion with that from which he came, and to which he shall return. For the wise men of very long ago have said, it is true, that out of the salt water all things came. The sea is the matrix of creation, and we have the memory of it in our blood. But far more than this is there in the sea. It presents, upon the greatest scale we mortals can bear, those not mortal powers which brought us into being. It is not only the symbol or the mirror, but especially is it the messenger of the Divine.

Belloc calls the sea “the consolation of this our day” because it fulfills the soul’s longing for completion by granting the revelation of that single end for which God created man: “but especially is it [the sea] the messenger of the Divine,” and of the “further shore.” The multitude does not perceive with regularity the end because of the interruptions and obscurity of its vision. But for the children, the exiles, and the sailormen, the sea is their consolation, for they have vividness and perceive the end, and the longing for completion within. Thus Belloc writes that there, on the sea, is a man “in communion with that from which he came, and to which he shall return.” As the sea “provides visions,” so is the sailorman in communion with that which he beholds and can only behold at sea. Belloc goes so far as to indicate that the sea somehow provides the vision of the source whence the soul came, and its end. And thus is a man “nearest to his own making,” and Maker, for at sea is revealed to him the Unseen.

The sea has been the consolation of the centuries precisely because it is “the common sacrament of this world,” that is, the mediator between this world and the next. It has been the consolation of the ages in that it has given hope that there is something more by grant-

ing a foretaste of it. It relieves us from the delusion and imperception of the eyes of men: “The sea has taken me to itself whenever I sought it and has given me relief from men.” Belloc reveals his own intimacy with the sea as if it were a special “companion,” personal, generous, and hospitable, “the receiver of men,” when they should seek relief. A mediator not only gives hope of something more, but knowledge that it can be attained. In this way is the sea the guide and companion towards that end.

The adventure, revelations, perils, all end in repose. On this note Belloc concludes his cruise, symbolic of life’s journey toward final rest. He writes of his entrance into the last harbour, which signifies the attainment of the further shore, and of death:

There was a sort of holiness about the air. I was even glad that we had thus to lie outside under such a calm and softly radiant sky, with its few stars paling before their queen.

We slept under such benediction, and in the morning woke to find a little air coming up from the south like a gift, an introduction to the last harbour. We gave the flood full time, ... and turned the loyal and wearied Nona towards the place of her repose.

There is within this final passage the air of peace, awe, graciousness, plenitude and holiness. Arriving unto the last harbour provides evocations of death, and repose (yet fresh alacrity) in beatitude. The imagery of the sea and of the last harbour produces these evocations of death and repose; but, further, it sacramentally symbolizes and mirrors the passage toward them.

Belloc’s language in this passage reflects his profound sense of the sea as a sacrament. His choice of words while describing such benedictions reveal his sense that one’s experiences on the sea while approaching the final harbour mirror perfectly the soul’s approaching death and passage to the shore of blessedness. He describes the “holiness about the air,” the “calm and softly radiant sky, with its few stars paling before their queen.” His description of his entrance into the last harbour mirrors the entrance of the soul into the last Harbour. For
there is no final Haven in this world! (he says) As there is a holiness about the air and stars paling before their Queen, while the childlike soul prepares to enter Heaven. The passage evokes another parallel, that of the soul of the sailorman, having reached the full flood, and the soul of the child, (that is, the spiritual child, or the saint), having reached completion.

Belloc uses terms evocative of such things, fully aware that, just as these physical realities of star and moon, of radiant sky, and “little air coming up from the south like a gift,” present themselves to us as we enter harbour from the tumultuous sea, so too do the unseen realities of the angels and their Queen, the radiance of Heaven, and the little prayer sent forth as a gift, present themselves on our behalf as we enter the final Harbour from the tumultuous sea.

He says that they “gave the flood full time” because they could not open the gates until high water. As all was complete and ripe, in the fullness of time, the soul having reached plenitude, towards the place of her repose Belloc turned the Nona, “loyal and wearied.” He notes they gave the flood full time; his words are evocative of an attending, until the fullness of time has been reached, when the soul attains fulfillment of longings, and completion.

That Belloc concludes his journey using martial imagery reveals his sense of the presence of the battle, even to the end. That he concludes calling his Nona loyal and wearied suggests that there is something to be loyal to, and therefore wearied for, something to live for and therefore to die for. One is called loyal when there exists the possibility to be disloyal; one is called weary when there exists a struggle with which he must contend. The sea which reflects our passage through life, presents to us adversity, just as life presents to us adversity. He calls the Nona loyal to him and wearied in serving him, as together they faced the assailant, the unsuspected trials of the sea, “a sentient thing ..., abominably conscious and alive.”

Belloc uses figurative language about spiritual qualities to show that the adversary has a personality: he is alive and has a real intention to combat. In other words, it is not as if one were facing a dead and insentient thing against which one need not combat or defend; for it would have no purpose or will to oppose. The assaults of the sea proceed from a living adversary, who possesses a will. Belloc describes, using martial adversary, who possesses a will. Belloc describes, using martial imagery, his struggle with Portland Race:

It is a chaos of pyramidal waters leaping up suddenly without calculation, or rule of advance. It is not a charge, but a scrimmage; a wrestling bout; but a wrestling bout of a thousand against one. It purposely raises a clamour to shake its adversary’s soul ... Its purpose is to kill, and to kill with a savage pride.

In this passage he uses both martial imagery and the figurative language of a sentient and intelligent being. The combination of the two suggest a force which is both living and fighting. The sea possesses both these qualities when it would teach a man combat. Just as it teaches him truths of unseen things, insight into profound things, love of adventure, fear of death, hope for consolation, compassion for exiles, and all such things, so, too, does it teach a man combat for precious things. For things precious, often, precisely because there is a living adversary which wills their destruction. Threat impedes. The beloved is vulnerable and seen as such by our visibly effective impotence.

The sea teaches, as it prepares men for battle, that all life struggles to preserve those things precious to it; but it also teaches us that enemies of the precious, the good, worthy, and noble things of our precarious state linger: “Hence battle.” Insofar as Belloc views the sea as a sacrament, it is significant for that understanding of his vision to grasp exactly how he uses it as a sacrament. As a mediator and teacher, the sea, just as it tells us of the good angels, grants us visions, gives hope and consolation, and leads us to bliss, also tells us about those forces, living and malevolent, which dwell across our passage toward the further shore. In other words, a martial vision of life pervades Belloc’s thought and writings; he perceives the enemies to the precious and the worthy, what is worthy to live for, and die for. He reveals this vision through the way in which he uses his sacramental imagination to develop the aspects of the visible world which reflect the invisible world.

The sea which, for Belloc, is the greatest of all teachers, and the common sacrament of mankind, provides opposition, conflict and “perils for trial,” as if these, too, were an important part of a man’s passage through life.
It might be objected that Belloc seems to have a pantheistic metaphysic of the created world, rather than a sacramental view, informed by a Catholic vision of physical realities. He remarks of a particular spot at sea, as if it had a mind of its own.

Saint Alban’s race is a sentient thing. It knows all about you, and whether in its heart it only desires to play, or whether it has a wickeder mind, a mind it certainly has.53

And again, he writes in The Path to Rome, after having been vanquished by the Gries Pass which stands before the entrance into Italy from Switzerland:

Let us always after this combat their immensity and their will, and always hate the inhuman guards that hold the gates of Italy, and the powers that be in wait for men on those high places.54

Saint Alban’s race and the Gries pass both seem to possess a mind and will. Belloc uses terms such as the “genial earth” and the “sanctity of trees” as if a spirit dwelled within.

Though one might try to interpret Belloc as if he had a kind of pantheistic metaphysic, this interpretation would prove a strong misconception. First it is important to understand that Belloc is not writing a metaphysic. When dealing with literature, one must expect the use of imagery and figurative language. Belloc uses these in order to produce an effect. By making the qualities of an inanimate object alive, he intends often to remark about the goodness of God as reflected in His creation, as in His words the “genial” earth. God’s creation is good, it grants comforts and joys to men in the way a living thing does. So, too, there are malign powers, by God’s allowance-A mystery and a threat to which a man must respond combatively.

Thus Belloc calls these things as if they had a will to give comfort, joy, loss, fear, defeat, as did “the inhuman guards that hold the gates of Italy.” But he calls them so because he wants to hint that there really are living Wills with just such intentions. And most often these unseen forces work through the created world. Thus God reveals his splendour in the sunrises, His majesty in the mountain, His sublimity in the roaring wave, His graciousness in the morning dew, His humor in the elephant, His wrath in the storm.

His use of animate terms for inanimate things is rooted in his truly Catholic sacramental imagination and gratitude to God for his manifestations through the created world. That is not to say that he views all those things, including the will to destruction, fear, and defeat, as the unseen intention of God. Belloc perceives those other forces which would oppose man’s journey toward Rome and home. He anthropomorphizes these qualities in nature which reflect this opposition in order to give a sense of the presence of the battle. But that sense being present, Belloc also perceives the good, and with deep gratitude. This prompts him to call created things themselves gracious, as if they had the will to be so. But his gratitude is really to God who deigns to reveal Himself through bodily things, even as He became incarnate to reveal Himself to men in His great mercy.

Along the same lines of objection it might seem that Belloc tends to a kind of pagan nature-worship in which nature holds divinities of some sort. He writes in The Path to Rome as he approaches the frontier of Italy, having crossed the Alps of Switzerland: “I hesitated with reverence before touching the sacred soil which I had so longed to reach,”55 and further in his reference to the Hill of Venus, as he reflects on its haunting quality:

There was no temple, nor no sacrifice, nor no ritual for the Divinity, save this solemn attitude of perennial silence; but under the influence which still remained and gave the place its favour, it was impossible to believe that the gods were dead.56

He continues saying that he was “ready for worship” and in “a mood of adoration” as he left this sacred place. Belloc often presents nature as if it were sacred, or divine, deserving of reverence and worship.

But there truly is a sense in which nature is sacred, and it is in this sense that Belloc views it. These compel his worship and adoration not because they themselves are divinities but because they proceed from the gracious Will of the Divinity, and therefore deserve our gratitude. One sends his gratitude to the Creator, but he is grateful for the created. Sir Arnold Lunn writes of this same Catholic sacramental understanding of the world which compels gratitude. Having been warmed by the sun at its morning rising and thankful for the heat, he writes:
It is not, of course, sun-worship as the pedants maintain, but thanksgiving for the sun which Catholicism translates into poetry. Catholicism has assimilated all that is worth preserving from the older religions, and Apollo has made his submission to the Church.

It is, indeed, proper that dawn and sunrise and spring should not pass unnoticed by the Church, that the faithful should be reminded with due ceremonial that it is their duty to give praise to the Lord and Giver of Life.\textsuperscript{57}

This poetry into which Catholicism has translated thanksgiving is the morning chant of the \textit{Te Deum}. Nor has she failed to include the psalms of praise in which she exhorts: “Mountains and hills! bless the Lord ... Seas and rivers! bless the Lord.” (Dan. 3: 75, 78) Within the ongoing liturgy of the Church lies this ceremonial into which has been translated the praise of creation. Indeed, creation, personified in its quality of praising, literally does give glory to God by doing, in perfect harmony, what God created it to do. Thus does Belloc see creation as sacred and to be revered.

In her liturgy and psalms, the Church reflects this special sacramental quality which aids men to know the suprasensible by means of the sensible. Belloc defends this gift of the Church, those sacraments, sacramentals, and mysteries which she grants, because these are the means that God, in His Providence, has bestowed so that men might know Him first and fully, and become united to Him. Because man is a sensible being, he needs the intercession of the sensible world to lead him to God. All of Belloc’s using of material realities as teachers, or as granters of visions, is rooted in the sacramental sense which Holy Church possesses and which Belloc, therefore, defends and champions in his works.

He writes elsewhere, beholding a Gothic tower, once a part of a Roman bastion: “Had I not been a Christian, I would have worshipped and propitiated this obsession, this everlasting thing.”\textsuperscript{58} He distinguishes between reverence due such a thing, and the worship of it. It is clear he reveres it because it possesses the quality of enduring things and has, therefore, obsessed him. If he were not a Christian, this is what he would worship. But one can see this from another aspect: man would still be worshipping the created, if Christ had not revealed the true Creator. Man’s hope for satisfaction and certitude, the “final completion of the immortal spirit,”\textsuperscript{59} would vanish in the perishing, if to him had not been unveiled the enduring. From this evanescence had man been preserved; but had Belloc not been a Christian, indeed, he might have been a pantheist (or a Lucretian).

And yet, often the created is worthy to be revered, for it had the qualities of granting satisfaction and certitude insofar as it is bound to the enduring. That there is a bond between the perishing and the enduring, and that even in our vanishing world we receive revelations, the Catholic sacramental imagination allows him to perceive. Thus might Belloc seem a pantheist, worshipping the created, while, truly is he a Catholic, who with childlike gratitude and capacity for reception, worships rather the Creator.

Belloc reveals himself a man consistent with his Faith. It fully informs him, and with the honor and loyalty of a true Christian warrior he fulfills its demands. He defends the precious things, cultivated by a civilization informed by Catholicism. He champions a sacramental sense of life which marks a true Catholic vision of the created world. He fearlessly assaults the enemy, the moderns and their corruptions and delusions. Moreover, by means of his sacramental imagination, he shows that even the sensible realities which teach and mediate for men, mirror the unperceived battle, of which the Catholic Church is the primary contender. All outside of it are foes.

III. CONNECTION OF THE SACRAMENTAL IMAGINATION WITH THE MARTIAL QUALITY

Belloc is not just a warrior, but a Christian warrior, and, therefore, regards himself as having a particular vocation to living, fighting, and dying for the Catholic Faith. In these three particular works, Belloc withdraws from specific concerns and comments on some larger matters. In this he reveals a profound sacramental imagination, which leads him to discover, through reflection, the truths and mysteries which are hidden beyond our particular concerns, and which are of more consequence to men. Thus does he consider such things as childhood, the homeland, time and eternity, and the mystery of enduring things.
Because Belloc sees the sacramental vision of life as essential to a true Catholic mind, he shows how having it can aid us to discover eternal truths and mysteries beyond our work-a-day world. It is a means by which men can withdraw in order to reflect and to contemplate. It marks the Catholic vision of life, and sense of the goodness of God's creation. It inspires gratitude and humility in the face of the grandeur of creation. Belloc defends the importance of the sacramental imagination for preserving a right view of the world and man's relationship to it. The Catholic Church teaches the balance necessary in this relationship. Men are permitted to love creation, to see it as good, and to be grateful for it; but they must realize it as a means to an end, and remain detached from it. Belloc exemplifies the reverence due to it, but shows that gratitude for it is reserved for God.

The Catholic Faith does not merely include rules, doctrines, and dogmas; insofar as ideas have consequences, the Church has cultivated a way of life stemming from a Catholic vision of life. Belloc sees these consequences of the Catholic Faith, and defends the special incarnational sense which has informed Catholic culture and civilization from its inception. In this way Belloc shows himself a warrior for Catholic culture and for the truth which has informed it, the faith of the Catholic Church. In his book The Four Men, Belloc begins his reflections on the mutability of things. Lamenting the foreseen evanescent memory of his homeland, he reveals a profound melancholy and gravity. Belloc was an exile. He had reverence for the little things, and gratitude for the gracious things, but sadness pierced this man without a stable homeland: “All the land which is knit in with our flesh, and yet in which a man cannot find an acre nor a wall of his own.”60 Because he saw that this world was fugitive, and that even things beloved come to an end, he grieved over this passing. This grief never fully left him, but, as we see in The Four Men, he did not despond, nor did he lose hope. For he saw that in the measure we attach things changeable to the changeless, they will endure, as he writes in the Preface. One can see this message of The Four Men in the reflections of Myself after he awakens from a dream about his Downs:

I woke and shuddered. For in my dream I had come to a good place, the place inside the mind, which is all made up of remembrance and of peace. Here I had seemed to be in a high glade of beeches, standing on soft, sweet grass on a slope very high above the sea; the air was warm and the sea was answering the sunlight, very far below me.

It was such a place as my own Downs have made for me in my mind, but the Downs transfigured, and the place was full of glory and of content, height and great measurement fit for the beatitude of the soul.61

It is because of this special vision of Belloc’s about the transformation and transfiguration of these beloved perishing things that he, though he had such great dolor and gravity, retained the hope and joy of the Christian. Indeed, this hope is one of the gifts that the incarnational sense of the Catholic Church has given to men. Indeed, this understanding of the perishable reflects the Catholic sacramental view which teaches man the proper ordering of the temporal. The Four Men deals with the theme of how perishing things are to be viewed, and in what measure do they possess the quality of enduring things. By means of the character Myself, Belloc shows the discovery of the proper ordering of the temporal and the eternal.

Belloc begins in the preface with a lament of the memories of those things passing away. Addressing his dear Sussex he writes:

Nor would I write it down now, or issue this book at all, Sussex, did I not know that you, who must like all created things decay, might with the rest of us be very near your ending. For I know very well in my mind that a day will come when the holy place shall perish and all the people of it and never more be what they were.62

Because his little book concerns the changing and the changeless, so is it good to recollect those numerous, intimate, and little things, and those enduring things, of which Grizzlebeard would not again speak, “because we have spoken enough of them already during these four days.”63 But what is it that remains? To this did Grizzlebeard respond, “(but in another voice)”:64

There is nothing that remains: nor any castle, however strong; nor any love however tender and sound; nor any comradeship among men, however hardy. Nothing remains but the things of which I will not speak, because we have spoken enough of them already during these four days. But I who am old will give you advice, which is this-- to consider chiefly from now onward those permanent things which are, as it were, the shores of this age and the harbours of our glittering and pleasant but dangerous and wholly changeful sea.65
There is mystery in his words. At once, that which perishes remains. The lament becomes a revelation; Belloc has seen and mourned the changeful, and yet upon the vision of his Downs he truly has a vision: that the changeful will endure in the measure that we attach their love and memory to the changeless. Thus can the old Grizzlebeard say that nothing remains, nor any love, nor comradeship among men, nor even his Downs; and yet, though there is pathos in the presence of the fugitive, is there not also the shore and the harbour, the permanent things, at the end of the “wholly changeful sea”?

Once more must we return to the child. For, to behold such things as Belloc speaks of, “those permanent things which are, as it were, the shores of this age,” requires the receptive and contemplative eyes of purity. Insofar as one beholds on this earth those things permanent, is he experiencing what Belloc calls in The Cruise of the Nona a premonition of glory, a hint of heaven. Thus the pure are granted premonitions, of which Belloc says:

For certainly they are the supports of this life, and we creep from one to another like travellers from inn to inn, and when they fail us, the world will be no more endurable.66

The gravity of his words is piercing: that, alone, those fleeting revelations beneficently granted can make life endurable. For these are revelations of home and the homeland, the great themes of The Four Men. Again is reflected the gravity and melancholy of a visionary such as Belloc: he mourns the passing of things, and he fears the loss of his homeland. Within his lament for his homeland are evocations of the heavenly homeland, and the loss of those premonitions of it which grant endurance to the vivid soul of the child: “they are the supports of this life,” because they give a foresight of the next life, and of the enduring.

One sees in this little book the concerns of time and mortality, of precarious and beloved things. Belloc’s love of the homeland, the laughter, song and companionship that are bound up with it, allow him to pierce through to a vision of the timeless and eternal — to benediction and repose and plenitude. In The Four Men the land had been for the character, Myself, the mediator which gave to him as a boy a revelation of the timeless. Upon returning to those Downs as a man, the solemn mood of a man who prepares to depart from his companions penetrates Myself, “silent also for about the time in which a man can say good-bye with reverence.”67 The sense of loss pervades the tone and mood, as Myself’s three friends pass away, beyond the border of his homeland whence they had returned. Myself enters “that attitude of the mind wherein men admit mortality.”68 He forgets the vision of enduring things once received by the land; even his beloved Sussex seems to him another sign of mortality, as Myself anticipates its vanishing. She who had once granted such revelations, she who in his youth had taught him immortality, now sadly forebodes loss, decay, and death. He remarks, in this same attitude of loss:

...something had already passed from me -- I mean that fresh and vigorous morning of the eyes wherein the beauty of this land had been reflected as in a tiny mirror of burnished silver. Youth was gone out apart; it was loved and regretted, and therefore no longer possessed.69

He senses that even the eyes of youth pass away, those eyes which still in their morning reflect the beauty of the land. (Without them there is no reflection.) Myself expresses, at the passing of his friends, as he returns to the Downs, a sense of the loss even of childhood, and the youthful eyes which once reflected the homeland. It seems to him that even those innocent eyes could pass away, and lose the sight of home. Myself, left alone on the Downs, experiences the burden of the dolor of mortality.

This last passage evokes, again, Belloc’s sense of spiritual childhood. He suggests that youth has the “fresh and vigorous morning of the eyes” by which it is able to behold the enduring character of things beyond their perishable quality. In The Path to Rome, Belloc reveals this same notion of the loss of the eyes of youth and the return to childhood, by which one can see. Here, too, there are evocations of the spiritual child. He speaks of those who leave their home on the heights, and having reached the plains below, they behold it again. The analogy is with those who leave the Faith and return to it again, having beheld it really for the first time. And why do they return, or ever behold it, he asks:

I think it is the problem of living; for every day, every experience of evil, demands a solution. That solution is provided by the memory of the great scheme which at last we remember. Our childhood pierces through again.70
This passage is important to Belloc’s whole view of spiritual childhood, and of the return to it, lest one not behold again those revelations manifest to the pure in heart. We so easily grow to manhood and lose our vision. It is the memory of such things which prompts childhood to pierce through once again. So, in The Four Men, does Myself, lonely and dolorous, follow the crest to the Downs of his youth, “to an appointed spot of which a memory had been fixed for years in my mind.”

The memory of it compels him to seek its beauty again. But the beauty of these Downs was more than a natural beauty, having in them the quality of a sacrament:

To us four men, no one of whom could know the other, and who had met by I could not tell what chance, and would part very soon for ever, these things were given. All four of us together received the sacrament of that wide and silent beauty, and we ourselves went in silence to receive it.

It is not the memory and sight of the perishing, but the memory of the vision of the enduring which lets childhood pierce through again. So Belloc searches out the place above his precious Downs where he once, when eyes were fresh and souls pure, beheld the timeless.

Because these Downs possess the quality of a sacrament do they have in them, in that measure, “the character of enduring things,” and grant revelations of the eternal. Belloc, while advancing toward the place of vision, perceives the sacramental qualities of the things about him. He reflects on the sacrament of “that wide and silent beauty,” recollected in spirit, and receiving the inspiration and benediction of its silence. To Belloc, silence possesses a sacramental quality, capable of inspiring sight of the unseen, capable of compelling gratitude for its own benediction; indeed, silence is a blessing and with which alone can one perceive the motions and inducements of the sacred unseen. Having reached his place on the height above the Downs, overlooking the sea on the one side, he perceived the stillness; “nor did any animal move in the brushwood near me to insult the majesty of that silence.” In The Path to Rome the sacramental quality of silence is evident in his words regarding its effects on the recollected spirit: “I could have rested there a long time, letting my tired body lapse into the advancing darkness, and catching in my spirit the inspiration of the silence.

Until contemplating for a moment the vision of the Downs before him, Belloc remains dolorous in the presence of the fugitive. But, as he begins to reflect, he notices the effect of the inspiration of the air and vision about him: a poetic meter had entered his head and had been silently present to him for much time now. Then does he compose that inspiration which had arisen within him at the presence of his Downs. Belloc sees in them their character of mediation by which a created thing can inspire one to see and hear the harmony in creation: “These things,” he explains in The Path to Rome “are not like things seen by the eyes. I say it again, they are like what one feels when music is played.”

There is a special place which music had in the sacramental sense of life. Not only does it elevate the spirit to reflections of deeper matters and to the divine, but also it mirrors the harmony in the created world. In this way, it bespeaks the motions of the divine in the created world, and the transfiguration of the created world toward the divine. Belloc reveals the heightened sense that music educes: his visions seemed to him beyond the influences of mere sight, but extending to the divine impulses of music: “they are like to what one feels when music is played.”

Receiving such inspirations at the sight of his Downs, Myself recalls the once forgotten visions of youth, and his childhood pierces through again. Once again he sees the enduring quality in things:

Ah! but if a man is part of and is rooted in one steadfast piece of earth, which had nourished him and given his being, and if he can on his side lend it glory and do it service (I thought), it will be a friend to him for ever, and he has outflanked Death in a way.

Myself had thought he lost his childhood: “Youth was gone out apart; it was loved and regretted, and therefore no longer possessed.” He remarks how the morn-
ing of the eyes had failed him, which morning permitted the sight of his homelands, distant and of an unearthly beauty, a beauty able to inspire music. Without this morning of the eyes he perceived only the mortality and the precarious quality attached to those things beloved; one's Downs, one's youth.

But, upon the memory of the sight of enduring things, which he had when he was a child, Myself regains his youth. He regains it in the sense that he enters into a spiritual childhood which allows him to see the character of enduring things in the temporal. He then composes a verse which turns his lament to a triumph:

He does not die ... that can bequeath
Some influence to the land he knows,
Or dares, persistent, interwreath
Love permanent with the wild hedgerows;
He does not die, but still remains
Substantiate with his darling plains.

So, therefore, though myself be crosst
The shuddering of that dreadful day
When friend and fire and home are lost
And even children drawn away
The passer-by shall hear me still,
A boy that sings on Duncton Hill.  

There is a movement in the book from the mutable to the eternal. Grizzlebeard says that no thing remains; not even does the companionship of those four men endure. But from the beginning echoes Belloc's apostrophe to Sussex: that in the measure a man attaches his human loves to things unchangeable, so will they mature and broaden:

And on this account, Sussex does a man come to love with all his heart, that part of earth which nourished his boyhood. For it does not change, or if it changes, very little, and he finds in it the character of enduring things.

Thus has he “outflanked Death” by preserving or regaining that childhood which is so intimately bound with the vision of enduring things, indeed, which spiritual childhood is itself an enduring thing. The themes Belloc touches upon in this book deal with deep matters of the Faith and its effort to inform the lives of men. God used the temporal in leading men to grace and to salvation. It is essential that men have the proper view of its use and its promptings, that they learn a sacramental vision of life. Just as there is a movement from a vision of the mutable to the eternal in Myself’s vision, so must there be this kind of transformation in the lives of men who would seek something beyond the work-a-day world.

Moreover, Belloc relates this kind of sacramental vision to the need for spiritual childhood which literally outflanks Death and by leading one to the Divine. Indeed, the Church has always reminded that one must become like a child in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Belloc writes of the child, of returning to childhood, in order that one might also perceive, with a vivid soul, the eternal. Through these themes and their evocations of spiritual childhood Belloc shows a profound concern with such intimate matters of the Faith. He sees their gradual evanescence in the modern world, and that the Faith no longer informs civilization. Animated by his love of the Church and all that is bound to it, Belloc fights for these convictions, without which civilization is doomed to remain in its decay.

Belloc sees that the return to spiritual childhood means in part, the withdrawal of the soul to reflection and contemplation in wonder—attentive, receptive gratitude. Again, it is by means of evocation that Belloc’s love of meditation, and his reflections on the importance of it, come out. He links the idea of childhood with the contemplative by revealing the capacity of both to receive. The child, as we have already seen, has the capacity to receive great visions and revelations. And in his words in The Path to Rome, about “the infinite potentiality of reception,” is contained the very notion of the contemplative, who’s prayer is primarily received and actively passive.

Belloc is himself a contemplative, a man absorbed by the graces received as he beholds the beauty of the created world, and considers its mysteries and the revelations it has conferred. Thus does he express his own thirst for solitude, at times, that he might receive the benedictions of recollection and silence -- and know profound repose. Gazing, and inspired by “the loneliness and the mystery of meres,” Belloc reflects:

I wish, as I had often wished in such opportunities of recollection and of silence, for a complete barrier that might isolate the mind. With that wish came in a puzzling thought, very proper to a pilgrimage, which was: “What do men mean by the desire to be dissolved with and to enjoy the spirit free and without attachment?”
Bellox allows the mystery beyond the mere externals to penetrate him. It is there, but not all can perceive it. These are the gracious things, indeed the graces, which Bellox says in *The Cruise of the Nona*, alone make this dark life endurable. It is important to note that grace abounds, but that there is an intimate union between the gracious and its reception. One must possess that special quality of the child and the contemplative: the capacity for wonder which opens the soul to receive the gracious.

It might be objected that these reflections on perishing and enduring things, on mystery, reception and the contemplative, on love of the homeland and the eyes of the child, all have no place nor significance to a thesis discussing the martial qualities of a man.

It must be understood that the martial quality is not limited to the use of martial imagery, or diction used in describing things. He does use these, but note how he does so and with reference to what. In other words, their use is not so much revealing in itself; it is a common thing for authors to use martial imagery and language. But its use especially distinguishes Bellox because of how he does so. Nor can one understand how he does so until he understands the sacramental imagination which considers even the little and seemingly unimportant things to be precious, but vulnerably precarious and which sees them, too, as sacramentals which can reveal to men higher realities.

The qualities Bellox perceived in created wonders led him to reflect on and penetrate deeper mysteries. Because of this gift Bellox had of seeing things as sacraments, mediators and teachers of men, the kinds of description he uses regarding any one of the sacraments would indicate Bellox’s vision of what that sacrament is a sign or symbol of. In other words, a sacrament is a sign of a higher reality, unseen mysterious and supernatural. If we view those things he sees as sacraments, such as the mountains, or the sea, in the way he does, it follows that the qualities or character of those sacraments will be indicative of the qualities and character of whatever they are a sign of. Insofar as these sacraments signify the mystery surrounding this world, its creation and its end, in that measure is Bellox telling of such things by means of his sacraments.

He does not describe Saint Alban’s Race as a living and bellicose thing simply because this is a better way of describing it. He has a further intention; he wants to teach us something about the passage through life; that there are battles to be fought on these uncertain and antagonistic waters. If the sea is a sacrament, a symbol of man’s passage through life, and a teacher of men, this is precisely why: that it reflects those battles to be fought in the life of every man.

In describing his vision from the Jura of the Alps beyond, Bellox would not have even used the word “unknown” array, had he not had the intention of commenting about a further mystery than the simple mystery of the height, cold, and fierceness of the sight of them. “Unknown” indicates that within their quality of a host approaching, with its spears and shields glittering, is also the character of that which is beyond the seen and the natural. They are something unknown by man, as is the unseen battle which this passage evokes.

Thus, one can gather from his descriptions that they reveal something about the deeper mystery beyond the created world. Bellox’s sacraments often have a quality of conflict, struggle, and combat. In this way does the link between Bellox’s sacramental imagination and the martial quality become clear. Because the sacraments reveal something about Bellox’s vision of higher realities, and they contain in themselves the character of conflict, we can understand more clearly about his vision of life: that it is not without conflict, indeed it is a perpetual battle, with little calms and visions granted in between, which alone make it endurable.

By means of his sacramental imagination, Bellox shows some of his deeper concerns, concerns not only of his, but also timeless concerns of any true Catholic civilization. He reflects the same vision which the Church possesses and has expressed throughout the ages in both its documents and its living embodiment, amidst numerous Catholic cultures. These concerns which show Bellox a man of vision, he has dealt with in these reflective and meditative works. They touch primarily upon the matters of childhood, and its loss, of vision, and its lack, of the homeland, and its memory, of the mortal and the timeless, and of the presence of the battle for all of these. And herein does Bellox reveal himself a warrior: he sees the timeless matters, matters which have informed a Catholic vision of life, and he champions their preservation and rooted cultivation in slow fruitfulness, always vulnerable, especially in love. For all love is vulnerable, indeed makes itself vulnerable, as did Christ and His Dear Mother, Mary *Mater Ecclesiae* and *Mater Parvulorum*. For without
these, civilization is corrupted and souls perish.

CONCLUSION

All of Belloc’s defenses, that is, those concerns and reflections which he writes of, are rooted in his view that only two forces exist, and that the camps are becoming more delineated. Belloc champions the things which are bound to the camp of the Church, truths of timeless concern, and, therefore, to be made known and fought for. Truth has rights and claims which are to be secured. With this in mind, Belloc cultivates a sacramental vision of life, which is the kind of vision which marks the Catholic view of things.

Implicitly, Belloc has latched onto the essential disposition and ambiance necessary for the preservation of culture and of divine worship. Without writing an essay or treatise on culture, as did Josef Pieper in his book Leisure, the Basis of Culture, Belloc, nevertheless, defends the importance of the proper understanding of leisure, without which there is not real festivity or divine worship. He writes about the need to return to childhood, to consider the deeper matter reflected in the created world, and perceive through the created the eternal. He speaks of the sailormen and the exiles who are apart, withdrawn, from the world, and who have the vision to behold this true homeland at the further shore. There is a way in which leisure, and its creation of the ambiance for a vision of the eternal, for gratitude, and for worship, is linked to what Belloc calls the sanctification of time. He writes in this special idiom, reflective of a Catholic vision, to show the transformation of the worldly through its sanctification, so to speak, or its link to the eternal. Speaking of something perishable, yet beloved, he writes:

Memory bathes it and the drift of time, and the perpetual obsession of youth. So let us leave it there. I will put up the picture of an early love; I will hear with mixed sorrow and delight the songs that filled my childhood; but I will not deliberately view that which by a process of sanctification through time has come to be hardly of this world.81

Leisure grants the capacity to view things in this idiom, with a view of the link between the temporal and the eternal. These themes and concerns reveal Belloc’s awareness of the need to seek true leisure, in which men can withdraw from the obscurity of a utilitarian world, and cultivate wonder, and a true understanding of festivity.

Belloc had a modest way of expressing such deep concerns; he wrote more implicitly and with evocations of lofty realities. It was this profound sense of true leisure, of which Dr. Pieper wrote, that he possessed and realized was vanishing from the modern world. Dr. Pieper writes that festivity and the Catholic cultus is only possible with leisure. Catholic culture is based on this sense of leisure and festivity which engenders the capacity in a civilization for the worship owed to God. Belloc saw that without a return to that proper Catholic cultivation of leisure, not only could the Catholic cultus not endure, but civilization itself would perish in its despair, and, indeed, is not perishing in the measure it has divorced itself from the Catholic Faith, and the hope granted by the Incarnation.

Thus, ultimately, Belloc is defending the whole of Catholic culture and civilization, and the worship of God in the Holy Mass, which is its center. He writes of a return to the kind of larger vision which elevates one to a fore sight of the eternal through the temporal. He sees the evanescence of this vision in the modern world, and that it is intimately bound to the preservation of the Catholic Thing. He sees that history is a battle for these precious truths and benedictions contained in the Catholic vision, and that the Christian man is called to be a warrior against the foes that would destroy her.

Thus is the Catholic Church on earth called the Church Militant. She battles the foes, both seen and unseen, by aid of the mediation of Heaven. The Church is on pilgrimage towards its proper end, invoking the alliance of the angelic hosts and the great Mother of God. True son of this heritage, Belloc addresses the Mother of the Church, Mary, and reveals the martial vision of his own, and of the whole Church Militant, hopeful to join the victorious in battle of the Church Triumphant:

Help of the half-defeated, House of gold, Shrine of the Sword, and Tower of Ivory; Splendour apart, supreme and aureoled, The Battler’s vision and the World’s reply. You shall restore me, O my last Ally, To vengeance and the glories of the bold. This is the faith that I have held and hold And this is that in which I mean to die.82
NOTES


4 Jebb, Belloc, *The Man*, p. 81, as quoting from Belloc’s *Companion to Mr. Well’s Outline of History*.
8 Hilaire Belloc, *The Path to Rome*, p. 213.
29 References to the angels made in *The Path to Rome*, pp. 248, 196, 188-192, 163, 128, etc; *The Four Men*, pp. 31-42, 268-275, etc

In this passage in *The Path to Rome*, we can see the absorption of Belloc, and especially the common recognition of Catholic men, while hiking through the Alps: (for I sang, and two lonely carabinieri passed me singing, and we recognised as we saluted each other that the mountain was full of songs). (Hilaire Belloc, *The Path to Rome*, p. 295.) This is exemplary of the kind of precious, common vision (the sense of the presence of song in creation and its quality by which it draws one to eternal things), that Belloc defends.

80Hilaire Belloc, *The Path to Rome*, p. 78.