



FAITH & REASON

THE JOURNAL OF CHRISTENDOM COLLEGE

1986 | Vol. XII, No. 3, 4

THE CHESTERBELLOC, CATHOLIC DOGMA, AND THE GRATEFUL CONSENT TO PARADOX AND MYSTERY

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HE WHO CAME TO GIVE MAN LIFE, AND TO GIVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY, DEEPLY touched two very different men, and fostered forth their diverse plenitude. And His gifts evoked deep gratitude in everything that Belloc and Chesterton wrote, informed as it was by an intimate ontological assurance, faithfully linked to the heart of Love.¹

Belloc and Chesterton's pervasive tone of trustful gratitude in their writings will be more fully savored if the link between gratitude and *pietas* is grasped and retained. This traditional, Latin term, with no sufficient English equivalent, is to be understood as a certain intimate respect and deferential reverence for one's roots: in the family; in the *patria*; in the patrimony of common culture and civilization; in the continuity, wisdom, and slow fruitfulness of Sacred Tradition and the Church; and in God, entirely. *Pietas* is essential to integrity, and marks a fundamental orientation toward what has been received and accepted, inwardly and gratefully. It is, in part, an attitude toward a gift, and usually toward gifts which are unrepayable, incommensurate with our capacities, and even undeserved, as are grace and the gift of the Faith itself. *Pietas*, when attributed to God in the Christian liturgy and the Latin prayers, refers to the attentive Divine Mercy, for which men of faith are full of gratitude. Such was the rooted gratitude of Belloc and Chesterton, founded upon an attentive *pietas*, trustful of the God who is Love.

To these two men of responding Faith, the Incarnation of the Creative Love embodied the Divine Humility, even to the point of the ineffable Divine Humiliation - Gethsemane and the Way of the Cross, and Death.

For, Mercy - Love reaching forth to alleviate the misery of the creature - consented to accept the utter degradation and destitution of the Passion in all of its darkly penal character. The Godhead freely and uniquely and irreversibly bound Himself to human nature thereby. Plenitude was paradoxically bound to need and to the passions of a body, and to an emptying of Himself, so that He might complete His life which He chose to live in a family among men. He came primarily to die for us.

The way of the Incarnation is the way of the whole life, by way of humility and the humane scale of things. It is the way of rooted things, embodied things, of patiently cultivated things. It is the way of slow fruitfulness.² As Belloc and Chesterton also knew, such is the sacramental way of the Divine Wisdom, as He also loves and uses His creature, time, which is to be seen in the gradually maturing plenitude of His mediating Body, the Church, until the end of time. The greater the evil God allows, the greater the good He intends to bring out of it: as it was with the evil of Calvary and its issue, so it will be with the Passion of the Church. This is a mystery of the Divine Forbearance, or the patient Permissive Will of God. But, here is the root of faithful trust and living hope.

The Church, an extension of the Incarnation itself, in mystery, during this time of grace, is to touch the misery of the hearts of men, in mercy (*miser cordia*) and to draw the motions of their souls (as well as their bodies) toward the fulfillment of history in grace perfected. For Christianity, time is not an emptying out, but rather a filling up, towards

plenitude, in glory. Such a paradoxical conviction of goodness, amidst the manifest suffering of a protracted mortality, permeates the words of the Chesterbello. Such a conviction also informs their orientation in time, and in trust, towards - diversity and fullness of all kinds. Herein, too, is a root of their gratitude, and of their sense of mystery, adventure, and joy. The grace of God gradually deepens down.

For, paradoxically, “the world does not include the Church”, but yet the Faith is “local enough for poetry”, “larger than any other philosophy”, and “a challenge and a fight”. It is “mystical and military and metaphysically subtle.” For Chesterton, “the Gospel is the riddle and the Church is the answer.”³

The Everlasting Man soberly speaks of that first “Christmas in Christendom” which was to be a sign of the later “halo of hatred around the Church of God” (166), where the enemy “ordered a massacre of suspects” - the Holy Innocents, the Flores Martyrum; and “the Enemy”, as always, showed “the devouring detestation of innocence” and purity.

He adds, “Bethlehem is emphatically a place where extremes meet” (169) in the contrast between “cosmic creation and the little local infancy”, “divinity and infancy”, and “omnipotence and impotence” (168) where “the hands that had made the sun and stars were too small to reach the huge heads of the cattle”(168). In Bethlehem “holy things could have a habitation” and “divinity need not disdain the limits of time and space”(173). Christ’s “immortal infancy” (175) draws many things to itself on that first Christmas: “Its unique note is the simultaneous striking of many notes; of humility, of gaiety, of gratitude, of mystical fear, but also of vigilance and drama ... there is something defiant in it also like the permanent challenge of the Church”(179). For, the “Church contains what the world does not contain” and “has in it the sense of ‘something added’ to life, something larger” (176); and “in that sense Christendom is larger than creation, as creation had been before Christ” (175). Moreover, men “are never able to make something larger than the Creed without leaving something out”

(176).

This essay intends to explore the unique integrities of Belloc and Chesterton, but especially the source of their deepest common bonds in the Faith: namely, a special grasp of the paradoxical inner structure of Catholic Dogma, especially the dogmas of the Creation and the Incarnation. Their common grasp of dogma links together profound Mystery and concrete intimacy, the eternal with the temporal. This special sacramental orientation in time made their vivid souls especially responsive to a variety of intimate analogies which disclose the diverse range of the perfections of created being, in the order of nature and of grace; and which promised a plenitude in the contemplation of un-created Being in Beatitude. Such a sacramental orientation fertilized their attentiveness to the structure of paradox in the reality of God.

This essay would suggest a further useful analogy. Just as the Incarnation is the unifying bond between the integrities of the two natures of Christ, so too the embodied, dogmatic, ecclesiastic Faith is the bond between the two unique integrities of Belloc and Chesterton. The plenitude of being, uncreated and created, is mediated to the Mystical Body of Christ through many true, analogical relationships of paradox: between man and man; man and other creatures, and man and his Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. The paradoxes are multiple and profoundly ordered, as part of the larger Christian Mystery; and they are a source of intimate, concrete bonds with reality, proportioned to the capacities of created human nature. Belloc and Chesterton especially discerned



Belloc and Chesterton

the import, as derived from dogma, of this mysterious order of paradox, but each with his own unmistakable accent, tone, and felicity. In the order of nature and in the order of grace, paradox is at the heart of the Divine Patrimony of Gifts. Consent to such paradox is at the heart of human gratitude for what has been received as a gift.

Several such paradoxes are also a constituent of the Divine Covenant with man. The covenant of the Omnipotent Mercy is what Chesterton also called the vow - a free, irrevocable, loyal binding of one’s freedom,

even the Divine Freedom. The Divine Vow, which has been personally incarnated, inescapably involved renunciation and sacrifice - the consecration of suffering - as does all true love. Such divine loyalty, indeed, consummate fidelity, Chesterton saw reflected in the vow which is at the very heart of Christendom, especially in the vow of marriage at the heart of the family, and a sign of Christ's union with His Body, the Church.⁴ And the Lord of History Himself chose to be part of a family, and *risu cognoscere matrem*.

The loyal, incarnate way of slow fruitfulness also involved a special sorrow for intelligent and sensitive men like Belloc and Chesterton. Their dear, common friend, Maurice Baring, captured an important aspect of this sorrow in his own novel, *Darby and Joan*: One has to *accept* sorrow for it to be of any healing power, and that is the most difficult thing in the world.... A Priest once said to me, "When you understand what *accepted* sorrow means, you will understand everything. It is the secret of life."

Belloc and Chesterton, despite their differences and their robust capacities for joy, knew this abiding sorrow, and sought to accept it with grace and courage, while they yearned for an abiding fullness of life. Essential to the healing acceptance of sorrow was their own Christian consecration of sorrow, which grew more fruitful for others, too as they lived among us.

Belloc, so gratefully beloved by Chesterton, seems at times less inwardly accessible to some men today. Yet, the saintly Dominican, Fr. Vincent McNabb, captured in memorable words what Chesterton also saw and loved in that only man to whom he gave a whole chapter in his own inimitably precious, posthumous autobiography. The Chesterbelloc's spiritual patronus wrote a letter to Belloc and touched upon this matter of suffering, or sorrow - *dolor* - which is itself the *consciousness* of pain:

You have been a light-house for almost more than the run of life-times. It has brought you a certain loneliness amongst the sea and winds. But your moments of conscious loneliness can hardly be more than moments when you know - as we must make you know - how many your light has guided and how many your heroism of ACCEPTED LONELINESS has heartened. What I personally owe to the light-house that you are I can only dimly discern but can never repay.... I often ask God to further you in your great battles for the poor and for their Master.⁵

From a more blessed place, now, may they pray for us lesser warriors and poorer Christians, who need so much their light and strength among us. But, it is also well with us because we trust

With faithful eyes,
Fixed forward and turned upwards to the skies,
That it is well with you, Among the chosen few,
Among the very brave, the very true.⁶

Georges Bernanos, in one of his last essays, "Our Friends the Saints," speaks of sanctity, whose very way of humility "assumes" humanity, rather than seem to surpass humanity in the way of certain kinds of pagan heroes. The saint, Bernanos says:

strives to approach as nearly as possible his model, Jesus Christ; that is, to come as close as possible to Him who was perfect man, with a simplicity so perfect that in reassuring others He disconcerts the hero, for Christ did not die only for heroes - He died for cowards too.... You know that ... [there is] ceaselessly opposed to the Holy Agony of Christ in the Garden of Olives the joyous death of many young ... heroes. Christ on the other hand, wished to open up to His martyrs the glorious opportunity of a death without fear; but He also wanted to precede each of us in the darkness of mortal agony. The man with a firm and fearless hand can at the last moment look for support on His shoulder, while the man with a trembling hand can be sure of finding His trembling hand.



Belloc's poem, "The Prophet Lost in the Hills at Evening", evokes a comparable apprehension and consolation, unforgettably:

Strong God . . . Remember me . . . I
hunger and have no bread. My
gourd is empty of the wine ... It
darkens. I have lost the ford.

There is a change on all things made.
The rocks have evil faces, Lord.
And I am awfully afraid.

Remember me. The Voids of Hell
Expand enormous all around.
Strong friend of souls, Emmanuel,
Redeem me from accursed ground.
The long descent of wasted days
To these at last have led me down ... I
challenged and I kept the Faith,
The bleeding path alone I trod;
It darkens. Stand about my wraith,
And harbour me Almighty God.

Belloc, the often solitary wanderer and warrior, never lost a fundamental humility and resilient innocence of heart. The exile was to become a pilgrim, and to keep and to spread his spiritual childhood. And, such childhood, such trusting, though struggling, humility, was always also especially alive to “sacramental things”, and to their source.

In a letter to his friend, Katherine Asquith, in the Spring of 1935, from the Holy Land, at Gethsemane, Belloc’s deepened *pietas* wrote:

There are now left alive two or three very old olive trees - the tiny leaf of one of which you shall ... receive.... It is a material link with the most sacred place of the earth: the place where God Himself suffered. The Agony in the Garden is the core and height of the Passion. The near anticipation of a dreadful thing is the acme of its effect ... and that is why all those who know the significance of Christendom should revere ... Olivet. “Dieu meme a craint la Mort.” That is great poetry and therefore, justly interpreted, sound truth: sound theology. Not that God Himself can suffer, but that God was so intensely, so intimately Man in the Incarnation, that the memories and experience of Divinity and Humanity are united therein: and through it, the worst pain of the creature is known, by the actual experience of our own kind, by the Creator.⁷

The distinctive melancholy of Belloc (always an elevated and dignified sorrow) has always been felt, even to those who have only known him through his written words. The continuation of this same letter will therefore allow a deeper glimpse of something of moment to men:

We are, of all our miseries, much the most afflicted by Mortality: and that means no mere Death - least of all our own, which may be but a blessed

sleep between the good troubled life and the good untroubled life of beatitude - but the impermanence of all things, even of love: the unceasing tale of loss which wears down all at last. That is mortality. That is the contradiction between our native joy and our present realities, which contrast is the curse of the Fall.

Belloc admired Shelly’s eloquent, truthful words about “the contagion of the world’s slow stain”, and he always sought for what would preserve childhood, *simplicitas*, freshness, and innocence within a fruitful maturity.

The sense of childhood and the sense of sorrow are found in the timbre, tone, and taste of the most inward things that Belloc ever wrote. Speaking when he was fifty-five on the “fundamental doctrine that truth confirms truth” and that “all human conflict is ultimately theological”, he recalls his youth and the profound influence upon him of the great Cardinal Manning, and says: “I was too young to judge things so deep as sanctity and wisdom, but on the other hand, youth has vision, especially upon elementary things.”⁸

‘And Belloc often spoke of those moments of repose when he “renewed the memories of my childhood” whereby he was, like Europe when it received the Faith, “renewed in youth, and grew epic again”. And he touches too, the heart of things:

I had vivid memories of it [a certain harbor with its peace and loveliness] during a wonderful journey overshadowed by that air wherewith the Creator blesses childhood, lending to everything an active flavor of the divine; which is in three things, Clarity, Magnitude, and Multiplicity of strong emotion. For the Divine reveals itself in a special multiplicity, in an infinite variety. All that there is in color 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, our fullness of being.

In childhood our innocence permits us some little glimpse of such things; but with the passage of the years [and in a life without Grace] they are lost altogether. The light in the lantern goes out. .. If any man doubts the Fall of Man ... let him consider this decay of heaven within ourselves as the maturity of our manhood develops. The more we are of this world [and without Grace] and the more we know of it, the further we drift from the shores of the Blessed.⁹

When he was very happy Belloc would say: "I might turn boy again." And we may have such an aperçu from his early thirties, and also see some of the sap from *The Path to Rome*. In the little village of Sillano, in Italy, there was brought back suddenly to Belloc "the gardens of home and whatever benediction surrounds our childhood." In that "blessing of Sillano", there was "some promise of eternal pleasures or of rest deserved." And:

In a very early youth the soul can still remember its immortal habitation, and clouds and the edges of hills are of another kind from ours, and every scent and color has a savor of Paradise. What that quality may be no language can tell, nor have men made any words, no, nor any music, to recall it - only in a transient way and elusive the recollection of what youth was, and purity, flashes on us in phrases of the poets, and is gone before we can fix it in our minds-oh! my friends, if we could but recall it! Whatever is Youth - Youth came up that valley at evening, borne upon a southern air. If we deserve or attain beatitude, such things shall at last be our settled state; and their now sudden influence upon the soul in short ecstasies is the proof that they stand outside time, and are not subject to decay.¹⁰

Lest his overtones seem too Platonic, he would speak to us again, some twenty years later, and a little riper. He was again moved by "the awe and majesty of great things" and yet wondered "who in our times knows where to look for vision ... which proclaims ... the Glory to God." And "under such weathers as leave a hint of heaven", he later came sailing in when it was morning, in a leading breeze and in the light of dawn. And it was then he received, and tasted, and accepted "a draught to last forever." For, he says, "I spent an hour in Paradise", and he asks then, at once: "What are those days of glory. They are not memories: are they premonitions, or are they visions?" And he answers himself:

They are not memories, though perhaps Plato thought them so, and our modern pantheists, with Wordsworth for their spokesman here, called and believed them so. I will hope that they are premonitions, hints granted beforehand of a state to be attained. At the worst they are visions of a state lying all about us, the home of the Blessed, which we are permitted to glimpse for a moment, even those of us sad ones who may never reach that place.¹¹

For, Belloc always felt the sorrow of such men, and saw it in others, even by way of little signs. He said about a humble man who helped him once: "In all things this man was worthy of a friend, for I could see in his eyes that he had suffered exile."¹²

At the age of sixty-five, Belloc says, slightly later in the above-mentioned letter, concerning the misery of mortality which is in "the air of desperation which the race must breathe", that:

the miracle whereby such an enormity coming upon immortal souls does not breed despair, is the chief miracle of the Incarnation- and to work that miracle, the Incarnate - with what a supreme energy - accepted our pain, almost refused it, but accepted it and it was greater than any pain of ours: physically beyond endurance and in the spirit a descent into Hell.

For Belloc, as for Chesterton with his own distinctive tonality, this lucid view is a rooted conviction, no momentary mood.

And then Belloc adds a word on prayer: "Nowhere is there meaning in prayer as at Gethsemane. Upon such a foundation, perhaps the soul that prays shall lift into fulfillment and recovery. It is, that Garden and its shrine, the very center of man's world."

Belloc also adds some bitter salt of reality, along with his savor of goodness, to the letter's conclusion. He speaks now of a degraded, circumambient, and spiritually tawdry reality. For, he says, Olivet was then (1935) "surrounded ... with all the turpitude man can fall to, and all the baseness and betrayal that man, when he revels in hypocrisy, can attain." but, Olivet has "survived every other attack, the alternate neglect and assault of those twenty hundred years, and the light shines unchanged over it." So much is to be found here of the core of the heart of Belloc - and of his complementary part in the Chesterbelloc, too.

All of this may be glimpsed and tasted in what they both wrote, which is to be cherished as their gift, and His, to us. This tonic patrimony is timely still, and timeless, and a complementary benediction.

The Incarnate God who founded a Church formed two diverse, but prompt and answering hearts in our Belloc and Chesterton. Robust, but humble, were

these men of the Faith, a faith they loyally held and dearly loved in common, as conscious parts of the Catholic THING - the RES CATHOLICA. It has been a providential mercy - and maybe also a wonder - that this Chesterbelloc combination has lived among us, fruitful, and abides, to nourish still our insufficiency.

Our two men of the Faith were deeply touched by the noble pathos of the Virgilian sadness, by half his lines tintured with the nequiquam (“in vain”). They were moved when they read Virgil’s *sunt lacrimae rerum, mentem mortalia tangunt*, but may have suddenly also sensed, in grace, that the final tears at the heart of things are not the tears of sadness, but rather the tears of joy. In this life below, nevertheless, these Christian viatores also knew that a paradox of “joy in anguish” is experienced. It is a permanent part of the pilgrim’s *via crucis*, but the joy seems more fragile and impermanent. Both the joy and the suffering are combined and must be lived, and though the joys may be very brief they are also very piercing.

In the paradox of the Chesterbelloc, Belloc could especially feel and express the sorrow and the poignant fragility of the joy - the tragic potential, too, of man. Chesterton, however, could especially feel and express the *praegustatum* of a fuller and final joy, and radiate a certain *inchoatio vitae aeternae*, or an *excessus* - an abundant overflow - as known in festive comedy; especially, as glimpsed in the Divine Comedy of Providence, where “God writes straight with crooked lines”, since His plan is perfect. Chesterton, viewing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, could glimpse and savor the “merry supernatural”. He also himself saw that, in the “huge humility” of his heart, St. Thomas Aquinas always expressed a certain joyful serenity, whose living fruitfulness lay in “a belief in more reality, not less”, which may be seen even in “the deceitfulness of things.” Chesterton says in his book on St. Thomas: “If things deceive us, it is by being more real than they seem. . . . as ends in themselves they always deceive . . . as things tending to a greater end [‘fruition’, or ‘fulfillment’] they are even more real than we think them.”¹³

The unique resonance of this complementary pair of men will freshly bolster them who grope and falter, untouched and unsurprised, as yet, perhaps, by their lucid words of alacrity. For, they are wholesome words so filled with truth and with the love of truth - and so rooted in their gratitude.

How grateful, too, are those others who have already given a glad consent to accept this energetic combination. For, there is a vivacity in the Chesterbelloc, and it is a FESTIVE PARADOX with its own unique mode of presence. It is, certainly, an expressive incorporation and an inviting communion. It is even a humorous emblem - or even a “boisterous, totemic beast”, but, it is also a fitting sign of the mysterious unity and the restorative diversity of the Catholic Thing. Shaw’s “monster”, this Chesterbelloc, may have produced in its own afterlife - its surprising *Nachleben* - some unintended ironies, at least unintended by a Nietzschean, of sorts.

The festive paradox of the Chesterbelloc “corpus”, felt so well in their interrelated writings, also expresses a deeper import of Christian festivity, where what the faithful have in common is more important than what distinguishes them. (Chesterton often said the same thing about men in general.) Joseph Pieper, with characteristic penetration and lucidity, touches upon this deeper mystery of true festivity, and its link with a radical gratitude.¹⁴

In his *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, Pieper, like Chesterton when speaking on sanity and insanity, notes the “revealing marks of the intellectual sclerosis that comes with not being able to receive or accept, of that hardening of the heart that refuses to suffer anything . . . [that] refuses to have anything as a gift.” For Chesterton and Belloc, it was the Blessed Mother in her courtesy - a humble form of love in little things - who was the model of how to receive the Gift.

Pieper later adds: “The Church has pointed to the meaning of the incarnation of the Logos in the self-same words [when confecting the Blessed Sacrament], that we may be rapt into love of the invisible reality through the visibility of that first and ultimate sacrament: the Incarnation.”

In his later book on festivity, *In Tune with the World*, Pieper helps us savor the Latin words of St. John Chrysostom’s Greek, translated as *Ubi caritas gaudet, ibi est festivitas*. Wherever charity, a gift, takes joy, there is present true festivity. Thus, in the festive, there is essentially present an act of gratitude, ultimately seen in a *eucharistia* and in an *actio sacra*, known well to be at the heart of Catholic festivity. For, in the Mass is found the most intimate attitude and act of gratitude, because of (and in the act of) the Sacrifice of Love Himself. The heart of the Chester-

belloc knew the wounded heart of the Incarnate Love and the joy of the gratitude that springs there-from, to renew the humble heart of man. For, in order to be so grateful, who would not be humble?

In addition to being dispositive towards the Gift, the Christian soul must somehow face the mystery of defectibility from grace. The Chesterbelloc accepted this mystery as part of the larger mystery of freedom and probation.¹⁵ It was seen in the angelic probation itself. And Belloc and Chesterton knew, in faith, that some men may also refuse the gift and plenitude of love, and freely choose a diminishment of being, so that their will may be done. God's graciousness will respect our choice, and finally.

An acceptance of these darker mysteries affected their understanding of the drama of human responsibility, and hence of authority. For, it is the case that, in Belloc's refrain, *sine auctoritate nulla vita*. And it was the divinely constituted authority and authoritative teaching of the Church which was for them decisive. The *communio* of the Church was a divinely ordered, interdependent, hierarchical communion; hence, with an integrally authoritative structure of subordination. This living authority was another, living, precious gift. But, the gift was authoritative, and hence it made claims on man, to include the Church's criteria and standards for the formation of an honest conscience. Chesterton in his *St. Thomas Aquinas*, after speaking of the "much saner proportion under Catholic authority" than "in Pagan or Puritan anarchy", said that: "Religion is a very terrible thing; that it is truly a raging fire, and that Authority is often quite as much needed to restrain it as impose it (104)."

And this divinely protected orthodoxy gave a liberating, spacious alacrity to the hearts of these men, these adventurous wayfarers in time, facing inescapable risks and perils themselves. Chesterton often expressed such matters in the idiom of the romance, fairytale, and detective story, but Belloc shared the same fundamental convictions here, too. For both of them, heresy was a sign of the deformed, the disproportionate, the constricted, cramped and truncated. Heresy neither was, nor led to, a spacious, bountiful, generous fullness. Yet, both of these uncramped, munificent, forgiving men were able themselves to see marks of divine fullness both in awesome grandeur and in many little things, such as in a man's inconspicuous humility and in the mirth of humility.

The poise and proportions and plenitude of Orthodoxy kept the Faith a regenerative equilibrium for them. This vivacious balance kept the Faith always an adventure, always a challenge and a struggle, during man's short time through the mortal daylight. The Christian adventurer, as they saw him, is a pilgrim always, is a *viator* who hopes for the final benediction and repose in the consummate alacrity of Beatitude, in Belloc's terms. Now, such *felicitas* is but a brief gift, a *praegustatum*. Only then will *contemplatio* and *communio* be united in acts of uninterrupted joy, which will yet be a blessed peace, in a final tranquility of order. Such intimations suffuse what the Chesterbelloc commonly, and yet distinctively, wrote, as part of the bond between their unique integrities. In them both was a true responsiveness to the foretastes and the promise of the fullness of being.

Analogous to the paradoxes which characterize Christian mystery, the evocative "icon" of the Chesterbelloc presents a paradox in itself. Between Belloc and Chesterton there is a certain unity between contraries, a mysterious and enduring relationship between those two unique integrities, those two vivid souls. The dogmas of the Faith provided, as it were, a "mean proportional" to link their uniquely contributory proportions in a combined representation of the life of the Catholic Thing.

Both men intensely, but humbly, acknowledged their own radical insufficiency. They were insufficient unto themselves, they knew, and receptively and gratefully dependent upon the gift, in both the order of nature and the order of grace. And hence sprang their reverence for the mysterious incorporation (and the gift) of true tradition and its cultivated wisdom. By partaking of this larger, sustaining, and truly *festive communio traditionis sacrae* or *vivax memoria corporis* as it was nourished in Christendom (the historical reality of Christian culture and civilization) they could contribute even more of their own individual talents. And their own vivacious combination - and collaboration - was a uniquely fertile cell of Christendom.



There was a pugnacious and magnanimous spirit which their mutual bonds encouraged. Their disparate talents and temperaments made for a wondrous and infectious, if not pictorially incongruous, conjunction. In a certain sense, their equilibrium was precious and precarious. But, so is life itself. Such an alert, but endangered, poise befits their own capacious sense of the adventure and the zestful orientation of life. Risk and an ever-threatened stability also characterize the life of the Church, who comes to us down the centuries “reeling, but erect.”

The tone and savor of spacious adventure - and the touch of spiritual beauty - which permeate their writings would especially seem to derive from their inward grasp of Christian dogma. The inherently paradoxical articulation of certain dogmas touched them deeply and concretely; gave them a sense of order and proportion; led them to the heart of Christian mystery by way of true, analogical predications; and enabled them to live and to share life more abundantly. For, these vivid souls loved truth, protected and nourished truth, took joy in truth, and trusted in truth’s intimate and ultimate fruitfulness - especially by way of little things, and unto the final plenitude, where nothing good will have been lost. “Truth confirms truth” Belloc often said.

But, it will be more helpful to be even more specific about this link between the Chesterbelloc, Catholic Dogma, and the Grateful Consent to Paradox. For, it is the fundamental contention of this insufficiently grateful, but gratefully festive, commemoration that the consent to Catholic dogma intrinsically involves a consent to paradox: namely, a humble, grateful, and capacious consent to a permanent order of vividly and intensely, but mysteriously related, truths whose own distinct integrities and inter-relationships are vibrantly preserved and never diluted, fused, collapsed, or unfolded, such as can be seen, for example, contrarily, in the philosophical idealism of the Hegelian dialectic. Moreover, it is argued, he who glimpses, even a little, this connection between dogma and paradox and plenitude will better savor, and give more lucid consent to the paradox of the Chesterbelloc itself, and to their eloquent affirmations.

Chesterton’s writings are full of such statements as: “paradox is a sound rule”; “paradoxes are true”; “paradox means a certain defiant joy which belongs to belief”; and “all philosophical problems become paradoxical.”¹⁶ In *Orthodoxy* he speaks of paradox as at the heart

of Christianity itself which has often enough “separated two ideas and then exaggerated them both.” Such a paradoxical order is not a “mixture of two things”, which is only a “dilution of two things.” Paradox is “no amalgam or compromise, but both things at the top of their energy” in combination. Christianity has a unique ability for “combining furious opposites, by keeping them both and keeping them both furious.” Modesty emerges, for example, from the combined passions of “pride” and “prostration”. Such a combination of the “duplex passion” is “the Christian key to ethics everywhere” as in charity, courage, and chivalry. It is the Christian paradox of parallel passions”. A key to reality is also seen in the Christian paradox of parallel truths in dogma which reveal “the hidden eccentricities of life” by a “balancing of emphases”, or “an equipoise out of these excesses”. It is Christianity’s “great and daring experiment of the irregular equilibrium.” Hence, this brisk and bold, generous and regenerative equilibrium is at the heart of the adventure of orthodoxy, “the thrilling romance of Orthodoxy.”¹⁷

But, this true Romance must also be especially receptive, attentive, and accepting of the “mystery of humility”, because adventure is “a thing that comes to us” - “it chooses us”, as is the case in the mystery of grace.¹⁸ And, as Chesterton often said, without humility you cannot enjoy anything, not even pride. For, “pride is a weakness in the character; it dries up laughter, it dries up wonder, it dries up chivalry and energy.”¹⁹ And “the test of all happiness is gratitude”, for man has so many precious gifts on sufferance, such as the gift of grace, and the Creation itself, which (as with artistic creation) is a potentially “sanctified separation from the Creator.”²⁰ For life is a dependent independence and an “eccentric privilege.” Therefore, the creature owes thanksgiving, the primary devotion of loyalty, as well as the discipline of obedience, to the Divine Creative Will.

Christian paradoxes are “proven” in life, in a certain way, says Chesterton; Christian paradoxes are “proven” in life, in a certain way, says Chesterton:

The truth is that the tradition of Christianity (which is still the only coherent ethic of Europe) rests on two or three paradoxes or mysteries which can easily be impugned in argument and as easily justified in life. One of them, for instance, is the paradox of hope or faith-that the more hopeless is the situation, the more hopeful must be a man. [Such a “forlorn hope” is a “true hope” and, in a sense, he says, both “unreasonable and indispens-

able”]. . . Another is the paradox of charity or chivalry that the weaker a thing is the more it should be respected, that the more indefensible a thing is the more it should appeal to us for a certain kind of defense.²¹

With “these very practical and working mysteries in the Christian Tradition” in mind, we turn to consider, more deeply, two fundamental dogmas, the Creation and the Incarnation. These paradoxical concepts may now be clarified a little more fruitfully, it would seem.

The Divine Creator of the cosmos would not have been diminished if He had not created new being “out of nothing in time”. In other words, He would not have been less perfect, less good, less happy, if he had not created a beginning of cosmic motion and a finite temporality with a beginning, a directionality, a conclusion, and a purpose. Nor was it necessary for Him to create some “being other than Himself.” It could have been otherwise without altering the Divine Perfection. The actually created and still sustained cosmos also could have been otherwise; it might have had different specificities, different determinations of being. And such a dogmatic understanding of Creation reveals the core of the true meaning of the contingency of the universe. For, at the core of reality is love (“God is love”), a generous goodness freely - uncoercedly - given, and diffusive of itself in the creation (but which creation is not itself divine).

Moreover, paradoxically, in the very consent to create, the divinely creative will renounces the possibility of “being all being”, by allowing the existence of some being which is “other than Himself.” In one paradoxical sense, in the words of Simone Weil, “creation is renunciation by Love.” But, we touch upon mystery here. And, it is fitting to recall the characteristically forceful words of Belloc: “the impatient rejection of mystery is one of the main marks of stupidity.” *Caveamus, humiles*. Nevertheless, the mystery of freedom is bound to the mystery of love, which itself cannot be forced, but only freely offered. And so it must be with man’s own oblation of love to God, especially the oblation - gift - of his own death.

The Divine Freedom somehow “renounced” the possibility of not having another kind of being when the Trinity created *ad extra*, diffusive of goodness; and this diffusive, generous love has had the will to share the *ad intra* core of reality. Human words and analogies falter here. Yet, what a source of gratitude! And Belloc and

Chesterton both grasped the actuality and the potentiality of partaking of the inner life of the Holy Trinity. But, what is the mystery of man, that Thou art so mindful of him, and so ineffably generous, just by virtue of the creation?

Even though the cosmos - or, all created being - is not divine, nevertheless said St. Thomas, “*Deus est in omnibus rebus, et intime.*”²² God, by virtue of the creation alone, is present to all creatures most inwardly, most intimately. He is more intimately present to man than man is to himself, as St. Augustine also expressed it. And these truths will always remain in this order and in this way, and, expressed by a paradox, without falling into a pantheism. These implications of the dogma of creation were experienced and expressed by Belloc and Chesterton as a vivifying mystery. The presence of God to his creation was conveyed in a different idiom by each of them. But, their common sense of the Creator’s “rooted” presence imparted to their other affirmations, not an enervating doubt and equivocal mystification, but an alacrity and a clarifying and underlying metaphysical assurance.

Another paradoxical harmony, or unity of contraries (such as Creator and creature) may be glimpsed in the dogma of the Incarnation, where the fullness of being was also to be united to humiliation, destitution, and the uttermost degradation of Want in the Passion, where love freely consented to redemptive suffering, a *salvificus dolor*, but without any necessitousness. This gift was even more wondrously gratuitous than the Creation.

The Council of Chalcedon’s dogmatic articulation presents the mystery of the Incarnation in an inestimably fruitful way. Christ is truly (fully) God, truly man, and truly one. This most intimate unity of the Divine Creator with the created Sacred Humanity of Jesus in the unique and unrepeatable Incarnation of the Only Begotten Son will always and unseverably remain. And yet, each of the two natures, divine and human, will also always preserve its own integrity, without fusion or confusion, in the unity of the Divine Person. From this dogmatic truth there also derives the proper integrity of the natural order, but which integrity is also properly, but mysteriously dispositive and related to the supernatural order. Yet, at the core of the natural order there still remain an intactness and an integrity, even though man’s nature is now *vulnerata* (wounded and vulnerable) by virtue of the original sin and its residual consequences. That “terrible aboriginal calamity”, in Newman’s words, has not destroyed the in-

tegrity at the heart of the natural order.

Belloc and Chesterton, nourished by such “feeding, fortifying” doctrines and their implication, respond warmly and fully to the goodness of the created natural order as a gift from God. They are neither of a Pelagian nor semi-Pelagian disposition, denying the indispensability of grace. Nor are they at all of a Jansenist inclination, with its chill rigorism and contempt for the natural order. Each of these deformations and disproportions they saw - also in their modern guises - as a defection from that plenitude and proper proportion which are characteristic of orthodoxy. For, orthodoxy keeps that gracious poise and those precious proportions between truths; and it produces a life of fundamental adventure. Their writings are instinct with the truths from the dogmatic sources, and with their consequent orientation to the gift, the risk, the “terrible dowry of freedom”; and the diversity and plenitude of being are an expression of these dogmas. In *The Common Man*, Chesterton characteristically said: “Will made the world. Will wounded the world. The same Divine Will gave to the world for the second time its chance. The same human will can for the last time make its choice.”

Here are linked the creative will of Divine Love, Creation, the Fall, the Redemptive Incarnation, the uncoerced human freedom, the irrevocability of ultimate choice. Man must freely consent to the precious privilege of the Cross of Christ. There is no necessitousness for him, but his will will be done, as it were, to include even the possibility of a final, irrevocable turning from the Divine Mercy. Risk is inescapable. May the time of Mercy not strike in vain. *Tantus labor non sit cassus*, in the words of the sequence, *Dies Irae*.

A sacramental link between the Creator and the creature is conveyed by Belloc when he characteristically says in his essay, “On a Great Wind”, from his collection, *First and Last*: “It is an old dispute among men, or rather a dispute as old as mankind, whether Will be a cause of things or no.... The intelligent process whereby I know that Will not seems but is, and can alone be truly and ultimately a cause, is fed with stuff and strengthens sacramentally as it were, whenever I meet, and am made the companion of, a great wind.”

Chesterton too, as seen especially in his book on St. Thomas Aquinas, is attentive of the “body of things”, by virtue of its dignification in the Incarnation. The

“holy familiarity of the Word made flesh” has about it “a sort of good and straightforward humility”. The “humanizing of divinity”, he says, is “actually the strongest and starkest and most incredible dogma in the Creed”, but of the greatest import, too. For, this dogma fosters and fortifies them who have “sanctified the senses or the simple things of nature” because “God and the image of God had come in contact through matter with a material world.” Moreover, he says, “a Christian *means* a man who believes that deity or sanctity has attached to matter or entered the world of the senses.” Just as “the Crusaders wanted to recover the place where the body of Christ had been”, so too, St. Thomas “wanted to recover what was in essence the Body of Christ itself, the sanctified body of the Son of Man which had become a miraculous medium between heaven and earth.” St. Thomas’ way of mediation was the way of humility, by taking the lower road -” So was God, when He worked in the workshop of Joseph.”²³

Chesterton also characteristically says about the link between dogma and little things: “It was precisely the creed and dogma that saved the sanity of the world.” The “creed of Creation” opposed an “atmospheric pessimism” and the view of the world as a “trap” and the “mood of mere destruction”, and also “an alternative religion of intuition and feeling” and “inner light.”²⁴ With Chesterton, as with Belloc, orthodoxy is not a mood, but a conviction, especially as to the implications of the Sacrament of the Body, rooted in the reality of the Incarnation. For, the Body “had hung upon a gibbet. It had risen from a tomb. It was no longer possible for the soul to despise the senses, which had been the organs of something that was more than man.”²⁵ Chesterton adds that “after the Incarnation had become the idea that is central in our civilization, it was inevitable that there should be a return to materialism, in the sense of the serious value of matter and the making of the body.”²⁶ The Incarnation added something uniquely precious to “the warmth and wonder of created things”, which “St. Thomas of the Creator” inimitably conveyed.²⁷ This sense of the body, to include the dogma of the Resurrection of the Body, is linked with the mysteries of grace by a sort of “sublimation”, in Chesterton’s words, “that is the lifting power of a lower energy to higher ends.”²⁸ Such a consecration may also be a consecration of suffering - namely, true Christian sacrifice - where man is also “thanking the Redeemer by partially sharing His suffering.”²⁹ So too, it may be in the consecration of the intelligence, with its special forms of suffering, but also of humble gratitude

in contemplation. St. Thomas himself was “always ready, with the hearty sort of humility, to give thanks for all his thinking.”³⁰



With only this brief consideration of the dogmas of the Creation and the Incarnation, one might also glimpse a further implication of moment to men by considering the mode of prolongation or continuation, of the Incarnation in time. There is a different mode of divine presence and disclosure in the reality of the Church and of the whole sacramental order, as consummated in the holy Eucharist and the *actio sacra* of the Mass, which is both *sacrificium* and *sacramentum*.

A paradox is immediately apprehensible when the Incarnate Historical Passion is linked to the sacrificial reality of the Mass. The sacrifice of Christ has once and for all been consummated at a specific historical moment, and yet is perpetually renewed in the Mass even to the end of the world, and to include its presence, somehow, even in the “New Heaven and New Earth.” These are deep mysteries of the disclosure and presence of God to His creation, full of the promise of plenitude.

Chesterton, like Simone Weil, could convey Love as an Infant God “absolutely ancient and absolutely young”, but in want even at the Nativity. The pressing persecution, impending slaughter of the Innocents, and the flight of the Child are memorably shown by him at the beginning of Part II of *The Everlasting Man*.

The Faith, for Chesterton, is a “religion of little things” but also the “presence of a spirit at once universal and unique” as at Bethlehem, where there was the most intimate conjunction of the eternal and temporal, yet also something fearsome. The infant Christ was born as one “outcast and homeless”, and “even as an outlaw.” Such is “the mode of the Divine Humility” full of the “the pathos of small objects” and the “pities of the poor”. It is manifest in the story of Bethlehem, and a story is “the soul of a landscape”, just as a “personality” is “the soul of a story.” And, in the story of Bethlehem is “kindliness and moral beauty” and “words of almost heart-breaking beauty” which show “His pity for our broken hearts” and give us “the conviction of incredible compassion

of God.” But, He who humbly submitted Himself to a long “domestic tutelage” likewise occasioned, from the outset, “the halo of hatred around the Church of God.” But, His Incarnation would fertilize, ever thereafter, “the consecration of concrete things”, as part of the *viator’s* own *via crucis*.³¹


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But, as with the mustard seed, leaven, and salt of natural analogies “the supernatural in nature is infinitely small and infinitely active”, in the words, again, of Simone Weil, but in concord with the view of the Chesterbellocc. Such are the seeds of grace. Such is the reality of the Gift. And, in the beginning - as in the fullness of time - was the Gift.

Chesterton fearfully and reverently also touches a part of the mystery of Gethsemane and of Christ’s cry on the Cross (“My God, My God. . .”)

when he paradoxically says that Man may not so tempt God, but God may tempt God.³² In another way, now, recollective of the Creation, “God has withdrawn Himself, permitting a part of being [the Sacred Humanity of Jesus] to be other than God”³³ and yet intimately bound to him in one Divine Person. This Kenosis - this emptying of Christ - is also a renunciation by love, and the core of providential mercy. Man, too, must imitate this acceptance, this consent of Christ - even the acceptance of his poverty and want. “Sitio”, He cried, so unlike the death of Socrates. “The condition of Salvation is thirst.”³⁴

Bellocc and Chesterton likewise deeply contemplated these paradoxes of Christian mystery and all they wrote is touched by their momentousness, even if momentarily. They did not want to leave out any of the truths. With modesty and a certain reverent reticence, their writings express the intimate implications of these Christian paradoxes for the concrete life of mortal man, who was created for Beatitude, but as brothers of the crucified Christ. Their manifold allusions and intimations are never far from the touch of Christian mystery.³⁵ This is the way of their implicitness and literary tact, and the source of their undeniable abundance which is attentive to the little things, as to the *parvuli* of Christ and to the body of things. Such is their inherent sacramental cast of mind, rooted in true analogies linked with the speech of God to man. Christ’s mediation, full of paradox, in the

Incarnation is the great sacramentum, continued in the Church, from which the Chesterbelloc drew and diffused vivid life, with gratitude. Chesterton's wordplay is profound when he speaks of man's greatest form of giving as thanksgiving, that meaning of eucharistia itself. Ingratitude, for Chesterton, was the root of human deformation, just as it was for St. Frances de Sales the root of all sin. For, in the beginning was the Gift, to which a reciprocating gratitude is the fitting oblation of humble love.

In such a context of gratitude and dogma one may also better appreciate the "un-pantheistic" conclusion Belloc's *The Cruise of the Nona*, part of which may be considered here:

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 is the messenger of the Divine ... The sea puts ever before us those twin faces of reality: greatness and certitude ... It has rendered remote the cares and the wastes of the land; for of all creatures that move and breathe upon the earth, we of mankind are fullest of sorrow ... It is the common sacrament of this world. May it be to others what is has been to me.

The comparably sacramental writer, Georges Bernanos, said in his valediction to mankind: "When I am dead and buried, tell the dear, sweet kingdom of the earth that I have loved her more than I ever dared to say." So, too, Belloc might have said with his dignity of melancholy; so, too, Chesterton, with his joyful spiritual childhood. One must go, they all knew, by way of the Cross to be united with Divine Wisdom. But the *via crucis*, too, is the way of slow fruitfulness. It is a rooted way, a mediated way, a way of humane proportion, by which grace works. It is the way of Christendom, the very way which they saw threatened in their day, but the way they deeply loved, and therefore the way for whose preservation and cultivation they fought. It is the way of Christ, *via, veritas, vita*. It is the way of the Whole Christ, Head and Members, in the unity of His Body, the Church, even in her own Gethsemane. For, her Passion is foretold, especially at the end of time.

It is part of the as yet unconfirmed historical prophecy of the Bible.

But, in order that the Chesterbelloc's common-

alities and diversities of expression about these matters might be a little better savored in the light of the dogmatic paradox, they should now disclose themselves a little more in their texts.

"It has been proved in the life of every man that though his loves are human, and therefore changeable, yet in proportion as he attaches them to things unchangeable, so they mature and broaden."³⁶ This characteristic sentence of Hilaire Belloc was addressed to Sussex, his beloved county. His apostrophes to intimate realities - the land, home, childhood, the sea, wine, God in the Sacramentum and the Sacramentum of the Mass - always have about them an elevation, a dignity, and the presence of mystery. And usually there is the touch of charm and mirth, even as a man of sorrow, who could profoundly feel "the passing of human affection" as "the worst thing in the world."

His responsive heart loved the purity and innocence of a child, and he always reached for diversity and sought plenitude. And he feared that "decay of what is living in the heart, and that numbness, and that last indifference" with "that frost stealing on."³⁷ This mysterious chill of estrangement was like the congealed lovelessness of Dante's ninth circle, from which his spiritual childhood sought deliverance in the final "benediction and repose." Belloc would likely have been deeply touched by Bernanos' benediction: "Blessed be he who has saved a child's heart from despair." And he knew, like Bernanos, that "the opposite of a Christian people is a people grown sad and old."

For Belloc, the Faith was a conviction, not a mood. It was a strength to him in his varied moods which were so sensitive to beauty, and which felt the magnitude of evil in the destruction of beauty, as well as in the spreading devastation of ugliness. Visiting the tower of the old monastery of St. Vaast, near Arras, he said: "During these weeks when the fiercest war has been thundering through the Artois, the world has had more to do than to consider the lost beauty of the past. But to some (and I am one) the destruction of beauty ranks very high in the scale of tragedies ... When shall I know what has happened to Arras? Not for months, perhaps. It may have been bruised or wounded or killed again after that first rising from the dead [the architectural restoration after WWI]. And so it is all over the land where the insane vanity of barbarism destroys and destroys and destroys."³⁸

He was alert to the mystery of necessity - of fate, destiny, and providential mercy - and acutely aware of human limitations. There was for him a terrible inherent fragility in human life. That life was precious and precarious, and often almost unbearably poignant. But, he was a man of magnanimity, with a nobility in his endurance. He faced many probations and sought for the proofs of truth, and troth.

As a Christian centurion - and a knight - he was, like a soldier of virtue, a man of fidelity, not a man of denial. His writings are suffused with this affirmation, whether about matters of grandeur or matters of simple humility, small scale, and the slow fruitfulness of rooted things. Consider his way of eloquent wisdom when he lovingly contemplates the reality - and mystery - of the sea, a great wind, the mowing of a field, childhood, a good woman, inns of the world, a cathedral, the death of a ship, Christmas, the Holy Land (especially Bethlehem), cheese, bakers, the Alps, surrendering one's sword, hospitality, song, lucidity in prose, and so much more that conduces to the festivity of the intellect and the affectionate alacrity of the heart.

Who could put down Belloc's memorable collection of essays, *Hills and the Sea*, whose introduction begins: "There were once two men. They were men of might and breeding. They were young, they were intolerant, they were hale . . . They were men absolute."?

It was these same two men, one of the Belloc himself, who soon are seen in their desire to come rambling down in the night from the high Pyrenees upon the people of a little mountain village so as to "inspire their admiration, and maybe also their fear"! (Or, who could resist Chesterton's beginning of the *Napoleon of Notting Hill*: "The human race, to which so many of my readers belong ...?") And then, there is the Rabelaisian rumbustiousness which first invites the reader to taste and take joy in *The Path to Rome*. Then, later, in a little Christian village, at the heart of old Christendom, near graves "set in a natural place of rest and home" and beside the churchyard and that specially satisfying "marriage of hewn stone and water" he thought of the Faith and "the unanimous devotion" of that village's "entire population." For a moment the Faith was not, as usual, "something fighting odds." Hearing how the village sang in Latin the Psalms they knew very well, and also that "very noble goodnight and salutation to God which begins - 'Te, lucis ante terminum'", Belloc said:

My whole mind was taken up and transfigured 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 ... and musing much more deeply than before, not without tears, I considered the nature of Belief.³⁹

With characteristic reticence, but in an especially revealing, extended passage, Belloc memorably conveys the words of the Book of Job: *Militia est vita hominis*. And, he concludes his poignant reflections with: "It is a good thing to have loved one woman from a child, and it is a good thing not to have to return to the Faith." To those who know his life and love, these words means even more. And so, too, are his words of poignant restraint in his stirring book, *Napoleon's Campaign of 1812 and the Retreat from Moscow*, when one knows that he lost a beloved son, and Cecil Chesterton, a beloved friend, in World War I - and Elodie, his dear wife.



But, we may especially see, in the following passages, that sacramental quality of Belloc's imagination - and of his ultimate vision of reality - which links dogma with intimate concreteness.

In "On a Great Wind" he continues about the wind, his "companion" that "strengthens sacramentally":

It is not that this lively creature of God is indeed perfected with a soul: this it would be superstitious to believe. It has no more a person than any of its material fellows, but in its vagary of way, in the largeness of its apparent freedom, in its rush of purpose, it seems to mirror the action of a great spirit ... The rising and falling of such power, its hesitations, its renewed violence, its fatigue and final repose-all these are symbols of a mind; but more than all the rest, its exultation! It is the shouting and the hurraing of the wind that suits a man ... a great wind is every man's friend, and its strength is the strength of good fellowship; and even doing battle with it is something worthy and well-chosen.

Belloc, as usual, combines mystery and intimacy and alacrity. He adds later: “We were ... made ... for influences large and soundly poised ... we are subject . . . to other powers that can always enliven and relieve. It is health in us, I say, to be full of heartiness and of joy of the world, and of whether we have such health our comfort in a great wind is a good test indeed.”

Then, mountains, riding, hiking, and “sounds innumerable in variation of tone and of intensity” are conjoined with a gale, “playing upon and awakening innumerable powers in man.” This wind “enlivens us with the simulacrum of war ... in the just pursuit of which men in companionship are at their noblest.” Moreover, “certain ancient pursuits congenial to man” like the riding of horses and sailing will remain, whereby “man will always at last tend to his end, which is happiness, and he will remember again to do those things which serve that end.” So it is with “the uses of the wind, and especially the using of the wind with sails.” For, Belloc resumes: “No man has known the wind by any of its names who has not sailed his own boat and felt life in the tiller ... As for those who say that men did but use the wind as an instrument for crossing the sea, and that sails were mere machines to them, either they have never sailed or they were quite unworthy of sailing.” The “tall ships of every age” have, not accidentally, “arrested human sight and seemed so splendid”, for “the whole of man went into their creation, and they expressed him very well; his cunning, and his mastery, and his adventurous heart.” And this adventure is especially linked to the wind, says Belloc in a characteristic conclusion: “For the wind is in nothing more capitally our friend than in this, that it has been, since men were men, their ally in the seeking of the unknown and in their divine thirst for travel which, in its several aspects - pilgrimage, conquest, discovery, and, in general, enlargement - is one prime way whereby man fills himself with being ... and like a vision after the sameness of our common lives ... wholly new ... the appetite for such discoveries is wholly satisfied ...”

Something even more sacred is conveyed in another characteristic essay. When, in 1925, Belloc arrived at the cathedral in Narbonne “just in time for the Great High Mass of Pentecost”, he had, as the Sacrifice began, “an experience such as I shall not have again, I suppose, in this life; such as I had not had before in all the many years and towns of my travels . . . all ... combined to give an immense significance to this which I was about to follow, this Act, repeated daily upon ten thousand altars,

which is also more significant than anything else in the world.”⁴⁰ He soon adds that: “He would be a poor heir of the Catholic Church who would consider the splendors of her most noble pageantry in the greatest Mass as in some way adding to the inward values and to the unseen glory of a low Mass said hurriedly in some chapel of a hamlet.” Yet, Belloc would “advance it to be true” that “the soul is supported by all sacramental things; that is, by all unison of the mind and body upon a proper object; and that when great architecture and glorious color and solemn music, and the profound rhythms of the Latin tongue, and the ritual of many centuries, and the uncommunicable atmosphere of age, all combine to exalt a man in his worship, he is made greater and not less. He is supported. He is fed.”⁴¹

Some have “the greatest of visions”, have “scaled heaven”, have “perceived our final inheritance and were admitted into divine company” by way of a detachment from the influence of the senses. But, Belloc admits that for him “the satisfaction of the *praegustatum* - the foretaste of that for which we were designed: our home” - requires the mediation of the senses. He says: “on my own poor level it is landscape, the sea, human love, music and the rest, that help to make me understand: and in their absence I am very empty indeed.”⁴² There, “upon the Feast of the Holy Ghost”, he gratefully recalls, “certainly all the support requisite, all the augmentations valuable to a man of my kind came very fortunately together, and I received ... what I had desired to receive: a great good.”⁴³

As part of his description of the Mass, he so characteristically concludes his essay, as follows, recalling the earlier mentioned “detestable Manicheans (for whom the modern name is “Puritans”) who “reject the proper glories of public worship and the unison of the whole of man into the act of God’s praise and God’s service”:

And when they sang the *Veni Creator*, I could swear that the Spring sunlight which fell colored on the stone floors took on another quality. And I remembered the singing of that same song on the great day when St. Dominic sang it upon the scaling ladder, and our people stormed the wall and destroyed the mortal Albigensian peril, and restored Europe. I must tell you that all this time the Blessed Sacrament was exposed above the altar on a very high place in a blaze of light. The Mass proceeded; the final prayers were said; the thing was over. If I could have got into that Nave of Narbonne all the starved, unbelieving men

cut off from the past in the dissolution of our modern world, there would have come out some reasonable proportion restored to the traditions of Europe.⁴⁴

And, by way of distinctive contrast, there may be for now a final glimpse of Chesterton which may provide a complementary invitation to savor more completely what these dearly beloved and very good men have left us to “understand with the loyalty of children and the patience of poets.”⁴⁵

Even in his early book, *Heretics*, before the fruitfulness of his full Catholicism later, Chesterton showed us “elementary and indispensable things” (272) which befitted him as a “missionary (an eternist)” more than as a “journalist”. He saw that a man’s “artistic attitude toward a holiday [or “Holy Day”] was his “way of accepting life,” and that his “moral attitude towards fight” was his “way of accepting death” (265).

Chesterton resisted, even then, the “attempts to conceal from men the awful mystery of their lonely souls” (263). And he combatted heresy, “the intellectual poisoning of a whole people” (275). He thought of humility as very “practical” and “that most uproarious of all things” (66), and as linked inseparably with “sanity and the feast (generosity)” (76). Moreover, chivalry meant “magnanimity (one of the lost arts of war)” (91), which was attentive to the weak. And this generosity produced Christendom’s variety, to be seen “in the highest things, even the Trinity” (50).

For Chesterton, moreover, “happiness (like religion) is a mystery” (108) and he glimpsed with gratitude “moments of joy filled with eternity” (108). Nor would he dare to resist “robust and uproarious humor and even very silly sentimentalism” and “jesting” and “the heart’s concern with mirth” (208), nor even “the fierce and glad attack” (214) in defense of truth. He had “the tenacity of conviction and the fighting spirit” (134), but also “the simplicity of the heart that accepts and enjoys” (136), for he saw “some eternal gaiety in the nature of things” (110) and in “the natural loves and laughter of men” (104).

Even then, his religion was “intense and hearty”, “popular, military, public, and sensational” (93). The “man of faith” was a “martyr and a fool” (97) and needed the “festive traditions” and the *antiqua pulchritudo* whose joy and hilarity was bound to the land and peas-

ants, with no “divorce from nature” (100). He could see “pugnacity as a virtue” (153) and that “the secret of life lies in laughter and humility” (131), since “the self is the gorgon” (131).

He wanted to preserve that purity, that “virginity of the spirit, which enjoys with astonishment and fear” (139). And he knew that “sociability, like all good things, is full of discomforts, dangers, and renunciations” (181-2). Life was a drama, not a system (194). It was a story - a romance - “full of fiery possibilities” (194). Such a life needed the “family and poetry and the variety of life” (194). Poetry was constituted by finitude, and by limitations; and so was romance, to include the “limitations of sin” (194).

Chesterton loved, then too, “good talk”; but, in order to have, like Dr. Johnson, a good talk: “it is emphatically necessary to be like Dr. Johnson, a good man - to have friendship and honor and an abysmal tenderness. Above all, it is necessary to be openly and indecently humane, to confess with fullness all the primary pities and fears of Adam.” With Belloc, Chesterton always had such good talk, for he saw Belloc as an especially “good man” and wonderously full of good things even when he was in apparently “low spirits”, as when they first met. But, even after that, Chesterton noted, whenever Belloc “entered the room there entered with him the smell of danger”!

Together, Belloc and Chesterton would support “the habit of uproarious drinking and the habit of uproarious dancing” (232) and singing! Mirthful wit and good humor abounded, for “unless a man is in part a humorist he is only in part a man” (233); “frivolity is part of the nature of man” (233); and in laughter there is “thoughtlessness, self-abandonment, and humility” (239). And there must be “laughter in the wit”, for “about the whole cosmos there is a tense and secret festivity” (233). But, in “geniality” - which is “strength to spare” (238) - men must act like those “who can laugh at something without losing their souls” (246), and laugh with “a large and wholesome variety” (242). They must feel “the full force of an ordinary man” (243), attentive to common bonds and symbols, “primary human poetry and Christian ceremonies”, not “mummery and flummery” (248). They must see the wonder and “the mystery in ordinary things” (262) and be pleased with “what will startle and renovate” (262). They must be “full of kindness which should come at the end of everything.” (304)

What is “insoluble” is not perforce “irrelevant” (299). A man is to have “vision and hope”; “a man without ideals is in danger of fanaticism” (298), which is “a too great concentration”, just as “bigotry” is “a too great vagueness” (299). For “the most bigoted are those with no convictions at all” (295). Bigotry is “the anger of men who have no opinions”; it is “the resistance offered to definite ideas by that vague bulk of people whose ideas are indefinite to excess”; it is “the appalling frenzy of the indifferent.” (296)

Chesterton, like Belloc, fiercely resisted “that sinking slowly backwards into the vagueness of vagrant animals and the unconsciousness of grass” (286).

For them, mental advance was to be found in “the construction of a definite philosophy of life” (286) - as in the Church’s clarifying progress by way of her accumulated anathemas, some of us would also say. “Man can be defined as an animal that makes dogmas” Chesterton also added. Just as being is determinate and specified, so must the intellect grow moreso.

But, in any constructive and affirmative view, man can be “dogmatic and right” or “dogmatic and wrong”

(287).⁴⁶ And thus emerges the matter of the norm of the Faith. And thus came Belloc and Chesterton’s turn to the living authority of Catholic dogma, to a grateful acceptance and robust consent to the Faith’s dogmatic paradoxes, and to the full implications of these paradoxes for the life of the Church. Their increasingly cultivated grasp of the truths of mystery, and their fresh alertness to their range of import and application in the concrete life of man, gradually deepened down into the life of the Chesterbelloc, and into what they wrote. And what they saw and fostered may also gradually deepen down in us.

For, it is to us that Belloc and Chesterton may yet - or still - uniquely mediate that more abundant life which He has brought, and bought, at so great a cost. They invite us still to “God’s good foison” (and embody it) where mystery and plenitude are sacramentally linked to intimate concreteness and diversity. These eloquent men of virtue and the Faith partake of the *Res Catholica*, and fruitfully foster forth the gifts of Wisdom.

May the Wine of the Harvest be theirs. May they know the Great Feast with Him now, true childhood and the vision of elemental things, benediction and repose, and laughter and the joy of friends.



NOTES

1 (Notes will be used mainly to make more accessible those quotes which are brought together from disparate contexts of a specific text. Parentheses are used in the footnotes, and sometimes in the body of the essay, to enable a facility of reference and to obviate an unnecessarily encumbering apparatus. Chesterton is more aphoristic than Belloc, and his insights and tone may be savored in shorter passages. However, Belloc’s style, especially in prose [and in spite of his own capacity for piercing brevity and lucidity and epigrammatic wit] is best savored in his longer sonorous passages of cumulative power, with their subtle modulations of tone.)

Chesterton says: “The test of all happiness is gratitude” (55); and “a proper form of thanks is humility and restraint and obedience” (65). “God and humanity made this philosophy [the Faith]; and it made me” (9) and he speaks of “the achievement of my Creed” (11); and speaks humbly, as usual: “How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it” (20) (earlier in *Heretics* he said: “self is the gorgon”). for, it is a “mask of madness” when one finds the combination of “logical completeness” and “spiritual contraction” (20); “Is there really no life fuller and no love more marvellous than yours?” (21). For, he saw in that “somewhat mystical egoism” an “awful emptiness” (26), because “if a man would make his world large, he must always be making himself small.” (31) and “it is impossible without humility to enjoy anything - even pride” (31)! *Orthodoxy* (Doubleday-Image, New York: 1959). In *Heretics* he also said “all genuine appreciation rests on a certain mystery of humility.” (65)

2In the *Path to Rome* (Image, New York: 1956), pp. 35, 39-40, Belloc speaks of the “large Village”, rooted in old Christendom, which is “the best of all Christian associations.” And in order to mitigate “jaded emptiness”, and restore thereby even modern journalists (“a nasty life and usually a short one”) “to ordinary living and the traditions of the race”, Belloc says: “every man should do a little work with his hands” and “indeed, if I had power for some thirty years I would see to it that people should be allowed to further their inbred instincts in these matters and should hunt, drink, sing, dance, sail, and dig; and those that would not should be compelled by force”! The forceful monosyllables are noteworthy and characteristic. And so too is his speaking of his belief, not in an “hypothetical God”, but in “a real God, full of beef, creator of heaven and earth and omnium visibilium et invisibilium.” A. N. Wilson, *Hilaire Belloc* (1984), p. 361.

3*The Everlasting Man* (Doubleday-Image, New York 1955), pp. 182-4, 189; and *Heretics* (John Lane Co., New York: 1909), p. 49.

4Chesterton’s chapter, entitled “The Story of the Vow”, in his book, *The Superstition of Divorce*, is lucid and full of insight about the precious paradox of the vow. In *The Everlasting Man*, where he characteristically speaks of “the sacramental sanity” (126) and “the consecration of concrete things” (183) he also speaks of the “sacramental substance” (193). And he links the Trinity with the triune Holy Family (54, 166).

5Citations from this manuscript letter are in A. N. Wilson, *Hilaire Belloc* (Hamish Hamilton, London: 1984), p. 210.

6The concluding lines of *In Memoriam A.H.*, Maurice Baring’s poignant elegy upon the death of the aviator, his friend, (and Belloc’s) Captain Auberon Herbert.

7A. N. Wilson, op. cit., pp. 338-9. In the envoi to his verse on “A Female Figure with a Child”, he says:

“Prince Jesu, in mine agony
Permit me, broken and defiled
Through blurred and glazing eyes to see
A Female Figure with a Child.”

After the recent death of his son (and after Elodie, his wife had died on 2 February 1914) Belloc wrote in a letter of 5 November 1918: “These things have the affect of clouding the mind. They destroy its vision, dogma alone remains; that is the supreme value. But vision is lost for the moment. He is undoubtedly safe and his mother has him. But the mind in this world has no relief.” (my emphasis added-A. N. Wilson, op. cit., p. 237)

8*Cruise of the Nona*, p. 48, 52. He adds, characteristically, later: “men cut off from the divine are also cut off from reason” (74) and speaks of “that quality vital to the truth: the sense of proportion” (254). And he speaks of “a very good example of that excellent rule laid down by St. Thomas Aquinas that all evil exists in mistaking, or misusing, the means for the end” (290). And Belloc loves some men “for they were much alive to the mystery of things.” (81) Moreover “the whole story of words is full of mystery” (13); and, like the creatio, words have a “habit of coming out of nothing” and have a “habit of adventure” (13). He suspects “the uprooted man ... a dangerous type” (100) and those who lack both trust in God and a consequent sense of adventure; and he asks them: “Will you never repose in the will of your Maker and take things as they come?” (64) And all such men “had far better accept the condition of mortality and remember a truth which was plainly printed in large black letters upon a large white placard in Eden, which was restated by Dante ... that our only peace lies in the doing of God’s will; which includes going to pieces in the fifties, or sixties, or seventies, like an old disreputable, sodden, broken-down, hulk too long adventured upon the sea.” (186-7)! Both vision and dogma nourished him, the first in the brevity of glimpses, the latter even in darkness and in shattering desolation.

9Ibid., pp. 103, 28.

10*The Path to Rome*, pp. 226-7.

11*Cruise of the Nona*, pp. 30, 160, 161.

12Ibid., p. 56. He was touched and pierced by another man who “made himself small” for others, who was “that strongest-souled and most sincere of men, who desired and did good all his life ... He loved the poor; he understood the sea. He was a brother and a support to sailing-men, and he had charity, humility, and justice in equal poise ... I wish I could come across him again in this world, somewhere at the meeting of the sea and land, and talk with him

again about the schools of fishes, and the labors of those who seek them along our shores, and the souls of sailormen.” (123).

13Chesterton’s *St. Thomas Aquinas*: “The Dumb Ox” (Doubleday-Image, New York: 1956), p. 179.

14Chesterton, throughout *Heretics*, is likewise eloquent on this matter.

15In *Heretics*, he speaks of free will as “the valor and the dignity of the soul” (106); and he notes a surprising link between “the doctrine of original sin” and “the doctrine of the equality of men” (108). Our situation is commonly desperate, and in need of grace.

16*Heretics*, pp. 103, 225, 232, 233 respectively.

17*Orthodoxy*, pp. 93-95, 98-100.

18*Heretics*, p. 190.

19*Ibid.*, p. 130.

20*Orthodoxy*, p. 32.

21*Heretics*, p. 129. Moreover, later in *Orthodoxy* he says that in the mystery of chivalry “there is a combination of ‘Christian courage’ and ‘the disdain for death’” (93); but in this courage the Christian “must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine” (93); he must be one “who dies for the sake of living” and not one “who dies for the sake of dying” (93) - and this is the difference between a “martyr” and a “suicide”. Moreover, “charity is a paradox like modesty and courage” (95), for it must involve “pardoning unpardonable acts, or unlovable people” (95). And the “Divine Paradox”, as he often said, is that we must “love our enemies.”

22*Summa Theologiae*, I q. 8, a/c.

23*St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 30, 31, 36, 41, 42.

24*Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

25*Ibid.*, p. 118.

26*Ibid.*, p. 119.

27*Ibid.*, p. 119.

28*Ibid.*, p. 133.

29*Ibid.*, p. 103.

30*Ibid.*, p. 71.

31*The Everlasting Man*, pp. 166, 170, 183, 186, 189.

32In *Orthodoxy*, he says that Man is not to tempt God, “but the Lord thy God may tempt Himself” (138) as on the Cross. And then there was Gethsemane: “In a garden Satan tempted man; and in a Garden God tempted God” (138). Simone Weil’s insights again resemble other reflections of Chesterton, as when she, too, reverently considers “the Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief” when He is on the Cross, “under penal justice” (which itself has an essential “character of irreducible, ineradicable degradation.”) Contemplatively she beholds Him in His voluntary redemptive suffering “after having vainly implored His Father to spare Him and vainly asked men to console Him.” See her *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (Beacon Press, Boston: 1958), pp. 137-8.

33*Ibid.*, p. 193.

34*Ibid.*, p. 76.

35In *Heretics*, Chesterton characteristically spoke of “the great philosophical common sense that inheres in Christian mystery” (305). Like the faithful Centurion or the knight, he spoke of the deepened, spiritual movement to fidelity, for he was not to be a man of denial, but a man of fidelity. And, in the Faith are combined “religious dogma”, “a mystical sanity”, and the “incredible virtues and sanities of human life” (305). And this was a “fighting faith”, “merciful and marital”, with “vision and hope”, “brisk and bold”, and with “bonds ... boundaries ... and dogmas.” Such an orientation, as expressed here in pastiche, percolates itself throughout the structure and the texture of what both Belloc and Chesterton composed. It is a sacramental vision of salvation history, and gradually fruitful. In *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton said that there is a “collision and a contradiction at the heart of the Cross”; “the Cross has a paradox at its center” and “thus it can grow” and be a “signpost for free travellers” (28) - viatores ac milites, et peregrini.

36H. Belloc *The Four Men: A Farrago* (Bobbs-Merrill, New York: 1912), p. vii.

37*Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

38H. Belloc *Places* (Sheed and Ward, New York: 1941), pp. 101, 103.

39H. Belloc, *The Path to Rome* (Doubleday-Image, New York: 1956), pp. 101-104.

40H. Belloc, “Narbonne” in *Many Places* (Towns of Destiny) or see *H. Belloc: An Anthology* (ed. W. N. Roughhead) (Lippincott Co., Philadelphia: 1951), pp. 240-244.

41Ibid..

42Ibid..

43Ibid.

44Ibid..

45Chesterton *Heretics*, p. 52. Subsequent citations of pages will be in parentheses in the text of the essay itself.

46In *Orthodoxy* Chesterton said that “the spike of dogma” fits the “hole in the world” (79).

