

Hilaire Belloc's "The Barbarians" (1912) and the Analogy of a Self-Sabotaging Cultural Immune System

Epigraphs

"The Barbarian....will **consume** what civilisation [hence sacred tradition] has slowly produced **after generations of selection and effort** but he will **not** be at...pains to **replace** such goods nor indeed has he a comprehension of **the virtue** that has brought them [such goods] into being. Discipline seems to him irrational, on which account he is for ever marvelling that civilisation [especially Christian civilisation, Christendom] should have offended him with priests and soldiers....In a word, the Barbarian is discoverable everywhere [even as a Caudillo Churchman] in this that he cannot *make*; that **he can befog or destroy, but he cannot sustain**; and of **every** Barbarian in the decline or peril of **every** civilisation [to include, even now, what remains of "the great and ancient body of Christendom"] **exactly that has been true.**" (Hilaire Belloc, "The Barbarians," pp. 281, 282-283—my bold emphasis added; italics in the original)

"Upon the model of this conception, men, watching the **dissolution** of our own civilisation to-day [before World War I, in 1912], or **at least its corruption**, have asked themselves **whence** those Barbarians would come that should complete its final ruin [as was once the case in North Africa and in Asia Minor, also with the Faith]." (Hilaire Belloc, "The Barbarians," pp. 273-274—my emphasis added)

"But the truth is that no such [mere] mechanical explanation will suffice to set forth **the causes** [not just the symptoms] of a civilisation's decay. Before the barbarian in any form can appear [also inside the Church], **it [the civilisation] must already have weakened**. If it cannot absorb or reject an alien element [such as a doctrinal heresy] it is because **its organism [thus its immune system] has grown enfeebled**, and its powers of digestion and excretion are lost or deteriorated; and whoever would restore any society which menaces to fall, must busy himself **about the inward nature of that society** [to include its composite and intimately religious society] **much more than** about its external dangers or the **merely** mechanical and numerical **factors of peril** to be discovered within it. (Hilaire Belloc, "The Barbarians," pp. 274-275—my emphasis added)

After recently re-reading after some years Hilaire Belloc's 1912 essay, entitled "The Barbarians," I have thought to apply a few of his keen insights about both ancient and modern civilisation to the current Catholic Church and her own "cultural immune system," as it were.¹ This limited analogy may also thereby allow us to consider the additional phenomenon of "auto-immune diseases," whereby an immune system comes to sabotage itself — sometimes swiftly, sometimes slowly.

Belloc begins his own searching essay with an aptly cautionary sentence: "The use of analogy, which is so wise and necessary a thing in historical judgment, has a knack of slipping into the falsest forms." (273) We must therefore be careful with our application of compressed metaphors and likewise preserve a just sense of proportion. For, analogy itself means proportion (*analogia*).

To help us understand his caution, Belloc gives an illustrative example:

When ancient civilisation broke down, its breakdown was accompanied by the **infiltration** of barbaric auxiliaries into the Roman armies, but the settlement of Barbarians..., upon Roman land, ..., in some provinces [was accomplished], by **devastating...irruptions** of barbaric hordes.

The presence of these foreign elements, coupled with **the loss** of so many arts, led men to speak of "the Barbarian invasions" **as though** these were **the principal cause** of **what was in reality** no more than **the old age and fatigue of an antique society**. (273—my emphasis added)

In this context, we might also helpfully recall what the Roman historian, Livy, had earlier (and very trenchantly) written, even back in 19 B.C., and in the general introduction to his own multi-volume history of Rome. Livy had then said that Rome had so degenerated and come down in those times even to such a point where "**we can tolerate neither our vices nor their remedies**" ("*donec ad haec tempora quibus **nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus** peruentum est*").² This compact insight about cumulative decadence is certainly "a terrible thing to think upon" (in the words of Father François Rabelais). Into such a weakened culture — to include a fatigued and weakened culture and immune system of the Catholic Church — there will come various parasites and barbarians. They should be expected (and firmly resisted). For, a certain kind of weakness constitutes a "provocative weakness" (in the memorable words of Dr. Fritz Kraemer)—"for it is so weak that it is provocative to others."

1 Hilaire Belloc, "The Barbarians," to be found in his own Anthology of Essays, entitled *This and That and The Other* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press—Essay Index Reprint Series, 1968—an exact reprint of the original 1912 edition), pp. 273-283. Further page references to this reprinted text will be placed above, in parentheses, in the main body of this essay.

2 See Titus Livy, *Titi Livi Ab Urbe Condita*—Oxford Classical Texts (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press—Oxford University Press, 1974, reprinted in 1979), p. 2—*Praefatio* (Preface)—my emphasis added.

But, in the face of certain threats, there is also a dangerous progression: from denial to indifference to despair. Some have even colloquially referred to the three sequenced tricks often employed by the Prince of this World: “I don't exist”; “I do exist but it makes no difference”; “I do exist and that's all that exists, the reality of evil; goodness is an illusion.” We might also call it a slothful mental or spiritual movement from “What's the difference?” to “What's the use?” — an expression of the despairing sense of futility. From denial to presumptuous sloth to despair.

Father Enrique Rueda's 1982 book — *The Homosexual Network: Private Lives and Public Policy*³ — illustrated for me such an enervating psychological pattern unto futility, if not, after all, despair. Father Rueda had told me that three-fifths of the specific evidence and other materials he had assembled he had cautiously “sent to Rome, and confidentially”: inasmuch as he did not want to scandalize the vulnerable faithful.⁴ His published *Homosexual Network* already had 680 pages of evidence and argumentation, and that was only two-fifths of the evidence he had produced. Even in 1982 — during the reign of Pope John Paul II — there was already a grave problem of homoeroticism in the Catholic Seminaries in the United States, and also in some of the Catholic Clergy. Father Rueda himself had, in his careful research, first discovered the meaning of “gay” which was an intentionally used ideological and meliorative word. For, he discovered, “gay” meant that both “being homoerotic” and “also acting out such a yearning disposition” were, in themselves, “good” and, conversely, “being straight was bad.” However, now in 2017 — 35 years later — Catholics so nonchalantly use the word “gay,” thereby appropriating (perhaps unknowingly) the soiled language of their own enemy or adversary or opponent.

Hilaire Belloc illustrated this same linguistic and essentially moral phenomenon back in 1912. Let us consider this matter now, especially the implications of an attenuated language concerning Marriage:

It is certain that if the fundamental institutions of a polity are no longer regarded as fundamental by its citizens, that polity is about to pass through total change which in a living organism we call death.

Now the modern attack upon property and upon marriage (to take but two fundamental institutions of the European [at least as of 1912]) is precisely of this

3 (Reverend Father) Enrique Rueda, *The Homosexual Network: Private Lives and Public Policy* (Old Greenwich, Connecticut: Devin-Adair Company, 1982), 680 pages.

4 Father Rueda also told me that, in his confidential report to Rome, he earnestly, and even insistently, recommended that the problems with homoeroticism should be dealt with on a “one-to-one basis, individually,” and “not at all with group dynamics” or with more collective “consciousness-raising sessions,” both of which would only exacerbate the situation and the disordered (or worse) affliction. He later told me that his recommendation was ignored and effectively rejected “because the problem is also in Rome.” These words were spoken to me by Father Rueda in 1982, while I was on the Faculty of Christendom College in Front Royal, Virginia.

nature. Our peril is **not** that certain men attack the one or the other and deny their moral right to exist. **Our peril rather is that**, quite as much as those who attack, **those who defend [marriage and property] seem to take for granted the relativeness, the artificiality, the non-fundamental character of the institution which they are apparently concerned to support.** (278-279—my emphasis added)

Belloc then considers the purported defence of marriage more specifically:

See how marriage is defended. To those who would destroy it under the plea of its inconveniences and tragedies, the answer [especially in England as of 1912] is **no longer** made that, good or ill, it is an absolute and is intangible. **The answer made is that it [marriage] is convenient, or useful, or necessary, or merely traditional.**

Most significant of all, the terminology of the attack [such as “gay” in another “marital” context] **is on the lips of the defence, but the contrary is never the case.** Those opponents of marriage who abound in modern England will never use the term “a sacrament,” **yet how many** for whom marriage is still a sacrament [such as Roman Catholics] **will forego the pseudo-scientific jargon** [e.g., “sustainable developments in and among the gay, single-sex civil partnerships”] **of their opponents?** (279-280—my emphasis added)

Adopting the categories and undefined equivocal language of one's opponents is, indeed, a recurrent peril and often a sophistical trap. Much alertness is required to detect and resist sufficiently such ensnaring sentimentalism or subtle humbug based on false premises.

Belloc will now introduce us to one such unprincipled form of the “strutting Barbarian”

The [presumptuous] Barbarian, when he had **graduated** to be a “pragmatist,” **struts** like a nigger in evening clothes [*sic*—as in Fats Domino's own singing of “The Darktown Strutters' Ball”!], and **believes himself superior** to the gifts of reason [and to “the accuracy of mathematics” (280)], or **free** to maintain that definition, limit, quantity and [the law of] contradiction are little childish things which he [the strutter as well as the dialectical Hegelian] has outgrown....

The Barbarian **hopes**—and that is **the very mark of him**—*that he can have his cake and eat it too.* **He will consume what civilisation** [or our sacred tradition] **has slowly produced after generations of selection and effort** [as in the cultivated vineyards!] **but he will not be at... pains to replace such goods nor indeed has he a comprehension of the virtue that brought them [such goods] into being.** **Discipline seems to him irrational, on which account he is for ever marvelling that civilisation should have offended him with priests and soldiers.**

The Barbarian wonders what strange meaning may lurk in that ancient and solemn truth, “*Sine Auctoritate nulla vita*” [“Without Authority there is no life”]. (281-282—my emphasis added)

Belloc concludes with some candor that should make us more attentive and more wholeheartedly resistant now to the ongoing subtle, and also the crude, subversion of our Catholic Faith:

The real interest in watching [and then resisting] the Barbarian [within the gates and even within the walls] is not the amusement derivable from his [often perverse] antics, but **the prime doubt** [*i.e.*, “*dubium*”] whether he [perhaps even as a crude lout or Caudillo leader] will succeed or no, whether he will flourish. He is, I repeat, **not** an agent, but merely a symptom, yet he should be watched as a symptom. It is not he in his [unmanly] impotence that can discover the power to disintegrate the great and ancient body of Christendom [and the Faith], **but if** we come to see him [that same Barbarian] triumphant we may be certain [“*sine dubio*”] that that [corrupted] body, **from causes much vaster than such as he could control**, is furnishing him with **substance and forming for him a congenial soil**—and that is as much as to say that we [and thus our sustaining culture of the Faith] are dying. (282-283—my emphasis added)

CODA

Hilaire Belloc's fresh insights about the Barbarian and about his recurrent qualitative conduct throughout history will now also prepare us, I hope, to ask with integrity certain candid questions about our own “fundamental convictions” and, thus, about some “fundamental institutions,” especially the sacred and enduring institution of the Mystical Body of Christ (the *Corpus Christi Mysticum*), also known as the Catholic Church — to include the threefold interdependence and interrelationship of the Church Militant, the Church Suffering, and the Church Triumphant. My observations and questions propose to cover the interval of time beginning mainly in October of 1962 (or a little before) and continuing until today. When the Second Vatican Council formally began on 11 October 1962, I was still nineteen years of age, and very young.

By slightly introducing some autobiographical evidence as a witness, beginning with my time as a West Point cadet (5 July 1960-3 June 1964), I hope thereby to make more pertinent, even more trenchant, some of my own searching and specific questions as a Catholic layman down the years, and amidst many intellectual, spiritual, and moral challenges. For, some of the things I first heard or read in my callowness and considerable theological ignorance later became much clearer, and, for me personally, even momentous. However, I early on was reliably led to understand that the deepest ongoing revolution was about the very nature of the Church, *de Ecclesia*. The subtle revolutionaries, striving to bypass and offset Pope Pius XII's own doctrinal distinctions, attempted to say that “the Mystical Body of Christ” was larger than the Catholic Church, and thus more “inclusive” and much more “ecumenical.”

Professor Roberto de Mattei has just recently made me understand this larger matter freshly and still more deeply than ever before. His brief 2 August 2017 article on *Corrispondenza Romana*⁵ said the following, for example:

On the historical level, however, Vatican II constitutes a **non-decomposable** block [sic]: It has its own unity, its essence, its nature. Considered in its origins, its implementation and consequences, it can be described as **a Revolution in mentality and language**, which has profoundly changed the **life** of the Church, initiating a moral and religious crisis without precedent. **If** the theological judgment may be **vague and comprehensive**, the judgment of history is merciless and without appeal. **The Second Vatican Council was not only unsuccessful or a failure: it was a catastrophe for the Church....**

When Vatican II opened in October 1962, Catholics from all over the world were waiting for the disclosing of the Third Secret [of Fatima] and the Consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.... What better occasion for John XXIII (died 3rd June 1963), Paul VI and with circa 3000 bishops gathered around them [at the ongoing Second Vatican Council still in Rome], in the very heart of Christendom, to meet Our Lady's requests in a solemn and unanimous way? **On February 3rd 1964**, Monsignor Geraldo de Proença Sigaud, personally delivered to Paul VI, a petition signed by 510 **prelates** from 78 countries, which implored the Pontiff in union with all the bishops, **to consecrate the world and, in an explicit manner, Russia, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Pope and most of the Council Fathers ignored the appeal....**

The failed consecration allowed Russia to continue spreading its errors throughout the world and these errors conquered the highest ranks of the Church, inviting a terrible chastisement for all humanity. Paul VI and the majority of the Council Fathers assume an historical responsibility for which **today** we gauge the consequences. (by **Roberto de Mattei**) (My bold emphasis added to the text itself.)

It was sometime in early 1963 — a year, more or less, before the 4 February 1964 Marian Petition to Pope Paul VI — that our two West Point Catholic Chaplains (Monsignor Moore and Father McCormick) said something unforgettable in a conversation. Speaking of the Vatican Council, they said: **“They have now asked the Blessed Mother to leave the Marriage Feast of Cana.”** (It was only many years later — in the early 1980s — that I learned of a French priest who seems to be the first one to have written those piercing and sad words, namely L'Abbé Berto, himself a *peritus* at the Council: Victor-Alain Berto (1900-1968).) Quoting Our Lady, he also poignantly wrote: *“Vinum non habent”* (“They have **no wine**.”). Perhaps in her dismissal she still had time to tell them that. About Grace, too.

5 See the 2-page English translation of Professor de Mattei's own article, “The Second Vatican Council and the Message of Fatima,” which is now to be found conveniently on the website of Professor de Mattei himself: <http://www.robertodemattei.it/en/2017/08/03/the-second-vatican-council-and-the-message-of-fatima/>. Professor de Mattei's original article was in Italian.

Some twenty years later, in the 1980s — while he was visiting my home in Front Royal, Virginia for the evening and for some deep historical and theological discourse — the learned Jesuit priest, Father Robert I. Bradley, S. J., unexpectedly told me a related story from back in 1965 and from inside Saint Peter's, concerning Our Lady's newly proposed title as the Mother of the Church (*Mater Ecclesiae*).

Father Bradley's careful historical recollection of these 1965 events — where he was personally present — had to do with the audible unsettling reaction to Pope Paul VI's new proposal, which he made in Saint Peter's Basilica at the end of the Second Vatican Council. (And he actually proposed it **after** the formal close of the Council itself, as Father Bradley himself said from his first-hand experience there.) It came to pass that Pope Paul's somewhat weak and shaky voice publicly proposed to the larger Assembly to restore an older title of Our Blessed Lady and Blessed Mother, and thus to address her once again as the “*Mater Ecclesiae*.”

Immediately after that Papal proposal, as Father Bradley earnestly acknowledged, there came **an audible hiss** throughout Saint Peter's — a rudely disapproving and an unmistakably audible and permeating hiss inside the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican.

It was only after this shocking report that I told Father Bradley about Abbé Berto's own 1963 words about Our Lady's being asked to leave the Marriage Feast of Cana. In both cases, she seemed to be an unwelcome barrier to Ecumenism, the new coalescent ecumenism or syncretism. Father Bradley and I then considered together whether or not to use, without scandalizing others, an evocative and reality-revealing formulation: “The Theological Journey from Our Lady's Being Asked to Leave the Marriage Feast of Cana to Her Being Crudely Hissed At in Saint Peter's.” It was, moreover, a weakening and self-sabotaging Journey of only two years: from 1963 to 1965. The Church's immune system was thereby further weakened. There are also signs of auto-immune reactions and disorders, or self-sabotaging actions (or evasions), whereby one actually subverts one's own protective immune system.

We may now incorporate these events and implications into what we have already considered concerning Our Lady of Fatima and her entire Message of Mercy and Warning — to include the already mentioned (and ignored) 3 February 1964 Petition to Pope Paul VI from 510 Prelates during the Vatican Council who were asking for the special and specific consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Not consecrating Russia then also may have weakened the Church's immune system.

In this context, we should ask a few other questions. For example:

To what extent were all—or selectively only some—of the Council Fathers informed about the the content and resolutions of the secret meetings held in Strasbourg, France and in Metz, France **prior to**, or slightly after, the October 1962 opening of the Council—those meetings being respectively held with Moscow and with certain representatives of the modern Jews? (The great Catholic scholar and French layman, Jean Madiran (1920-2013), wrote extensively and reliably about these matters.⁶)

To what extent did Cardinal Tisserant (after Metz) and Father Yves Congar, O.P. (after Strasbourg) make known the existence of their own individual private meetings and, especially, the content of their binding “ecumenical” decisions and agreements, to include any “secret accords” and hence their promised “self-censorship” henceforth about certain strategic and contested topics at the Ecumenical Council? Were most of the Council Fathers intentionally kept in the dark about such matters of secret diplomacy, and was this thought to be a sign of integrity and pastoral and ecumenical forthrightness? Were the leaders of the Council “playing with a full deck of cards”?

And how many of the more progressive (or purportedly “liberal”) Council Fathers and their own *Periti* may very well have gravely **perjured** themselves at the Council? For, they had all by then taken themselves the solemn Anti-Modernist Oath, which was only later withdrawn—**after** the Council--and then made non-binding and was even effectively, but quite quietly, revoked by Pope Paul VI himself, **in July of 1967**.

We wonder how such things affected the larger deliberations at the Council — especially their deliberations about the unique doctrines of the Catholic Faith, such as the matter of Supernatural (and Sanctifying) Grace and the specific Seven Sacraments and the Two Deadly Sins against the **Virtue** of Hope (Presumption and Despair), *i.e.*, against the Infused Virtue of Hope.

Does it not seem that even the proposed Gospel of Life—as in *Evangelium Vitae*—is essentially (if not entirely) about **Natural Life**, **not Supernatural Life**?

Moreover, how are we to understand that a Pastoral Ecumenical Council would not want to know more fully — and with a provision of Strategic Intelligence — at least two major adversarial groups (or combatant ideologies): Communism; and both the Range and the Substantive Content of Modern Judaism?

That is to say, what do we need to know about **the Political Action of Communist Forces**? What do we need to know about **the Cultural Action of Communist Forces**?

Likewise, what do we need to know about the **Political Action** of Jewish Forces, and also especially about the **Cultural Action** of Jewish Forces?

6 See Jean Madiran, “Rome's Secret Accord with Jewish Leaders,” (10 pages), first published in French in *Itinéraires* in 1986—and it was translated into English for *Apropos*, in **Issue 9** (1990). The journal is printed in Scotland. This earlier article (with four others) is still to be seen on the *Apropos* website on **29 July 2013**. Until his sudden death on 28 August 2014 the Editor was Anthony S. Fraser (R.I.P.). See www.apropos.org.uk (Archives), also *Approaches*: issues 84, 85, 86, 88, and 93-94 for additional writings by Jean Madiran. *Approaches* was Hamish Fraser's earlier magazine, later re-titled.

A wise French mentor, recently deceased, said to me years ago (in the 1980s) two especially memorable and reality-illuminating things:

As I look back at the Council and the cumulative Aftermath, I see, on several fronts, “the **Attenuation** of *Sacrificium, Sacramentum, and Sacerdotium—and of Grace!*”

Secondly, he said: “Our great challenge in this situation today is 'How do we properly resist the Corruptions of Authority without thereby subverting the Principle of Authority?’”

My beloved mentor saw and sensed so well the ongoing weakening of the Church's cultural immune system and its sometimes inattentively careless (and delusional) resort to **self-sabotaging** actions, to “auto-immune disorders and diseases,” as it were. He also knew that such enervating conduct would more and more provoke the barbarians unto further-sapping, or conquering, actions.

Like Hilaire Belloc and Jean Madiran, Arnaud de Lassus (R.I.P.) was a very great man of integrity, and graciously modest, as well. He was invariably charitable, **but always after the truth.**

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This essay is gratefully dedicated to the memory of Anthony S. Fraser (R.I.P.), former Editor of *APROPOS* Magazine, Son of Hamish Fraser, and a cherished friend who suddenly died in Scotland on 28 August 2014, on the Feast of Saint Augustine of Hippo.

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