

# Belloc Discusses Ignorance of Church's Position

WELL KNOWN WRITER EXPLAINS WHY HE DID NOT WRITE FOR THE DAILY EXPRESS.

Mr. Hilaire Belloc was invited by the *Daily Express* to contribute to the series of articles now appearing in that paper, from the pens of well-known novelists, on "My Religion."

He refused, because, as he says below, the proprietors of our national press would not "print Catholic truth save as an occasional 'stunt.'" And the "stunt" press, he holds, "is an evil which men who insist on high Catholic culture should avoid like a bad smell."

Mr. Belloc, in the brilliant article which appears below, originally in the *London Universe*, shows that the modern rejection of the Church is based upon ignorance of the things for which the Church stands.

## Mr. Belloc's Article.

Mr. Belloc says it is a political duty to inform fellow-citizens upon the Church's position. His article is as follows:—

We Catholics have all remarked what may be called the "vicious circle" of our presentation of the Catholic Church to our fellow subjects. The whole purpose of describing Catholicism is to interest non-Catholics; for Catholics such description is superfluous. Yet nearly all our apologetics in this country must appear in Catholic organs which the non-Catholic never sees; and this for the simple reason that the English press will not admit the Catholic standpoint; partly from dislike, but more from the fact that the Catholic judgment on anything from domestic morals to public policy seems to the average Englishman so absurd, eccentric, and perverse, as to be out of place in columns intended for general reading.

## Growing in Power.

Apart from the more important (that is, the religious) results of so lop-sided a state of things, there is a political result which is most serious and the seriousness of which is increasing. The average non-Catholic in this country, the average man representing the vast majority of the community and forming its public opinion, knows nothing of an Institution which (1) is much the most powerful in the world and is growing in power, (2) alone accounts for the nature of European civilisation, for it produced that civilisation; (3) animates and gives their general tone to the very much greater part of European communities (outside Russia).

This ignorance of what the Catholic Church is lies at the root of misconceptions of the gravest kind in foreign politics. It lies at the root of the misjudging and underestimating, especially of the Poles and of the Italians. It lies at the root of the absurdly exaggerated admiration of Prussia and of the Prussian organisation of modern Germany. It lies at the root of our distorted official history teaching. The distortion of history produced by such ignorance

may seem of small practical importance, but it is a weakening and a dangerous thing none the less.

## Cut Off From the Past.

When men do not know how it was they came to be what they are, their society resembles an individual who should have lost his memory. You get a very good example of this in the conflict between Capitalism and Socialism.

The average English non-Catholic, being cut off from his Catholic past, does not know that there ever was a society in which wealth was well distributed. He imagines Capitalism to have existed from all time, to be native to our blood, and therefore to be the only alternative to Socialism and the inevitable extreme of Socialism—Communism.

The result is that he fights Socialism with the wrong weapons and, indeed, introduces the worst principles of Socialism in all his attempts to modify the evils produced by Capitalism. He transfers the responsibility for the bringing up of children from the family to the State. He provides State support for the mass of the population in illness and in old age. He registers, tickets, numbers and stamps the whole mass of the proletariat and, when you suggest that the restoration of a peasantry and a more equal distribution of wealth would be a far healthier way of arriving at the support of a population, he cannot believe that such things are possible. He knows and believes that they exist in foreign communities, but he has not only been taught to despise those communities, he is also ignorant of their nature, and the reason that he is ignorant of their nature is that he is ignorant of the force which made Europe.

It has always seemed to me a direct political duty to inform our fellow-citizens upon the nature of these institutions of which at present they know so little and to give them some working idea of what the Church is in order that they may understand Europe and their past, and, incidentally, attain a wholesome fear of the direction in which they are at present drifting.

The other day a certain popular newspaper, not of the most dignified sort, the *Daily Express*, announced with a flourish of trumpets that it was going to publish a number of articles by a number of "Best Sellers," each of whom should tell the world what "his religion" was.

## The Views of the Novelists.

Observe, in the first place, the characteristic assumption that "religion" means a private opinion or mood; but next that all these vague relations of equally vague moods or opinions were devoid of culture or traditions, and were so provincial as to interest an educated man in one point only; that the writers apparently do not know that there

is such a thing on earth as the Catholic Church nor have the least idea of its quality or power. They talk of "The Churches," using this phrase to connote the very large number of Protestant sects, but with no mention or knowledge of Catholicism. When one of them says (as they all say) that he can no longer accept the "outworn dogmas" of the "churches" he means that he rejects such isolated fragments of Catholic dogma as until recently survived in a warped form among an older generation of English Protestants. That there is a consistent body of philosophy called the faith wherein dogma is not isolated and meaningless but co-ordinated and rational he cannot imagine.

It is exactly as if he were to say that he could not bear the smell of petrol "which is unavoidable in all forms of transport," showing by such a sentence that he had never heard of, or left out of account every steamship and railway in the world.

Not only popular writers and best-sellers, from whom after all one does not expect a particularly high standard of culture, but men of real eminence among our contemporaries show the same astonishing remoteness from real and living European experience, the same amazing provincialism.

Thus one of the most deservedly respected scholars of the Church of England, Dr. Henson, of Durham, wrote on July 8 last in the *Evening Standard*, an article about the attitude of what he called "religion" (meaning presumably the various Protestant bodies) towards physical science, and said in parenthesis that the Catholic Church had forbidden the study of science, notably in two documents, to wit the Syllabus of Pius IX and the Lamentabili of Pius X.

I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw this astounding sentence. It was as though a Frenchman had written that the rules of the House of Commons forbade a man to wear boots. I wrote a brief line at once to the paper (which the editor, to my surprise, published), asking the writer if he could give references to the particular passage in either of these documents which would support so enormous an assertion. He refrained from giving any such reference, for the very simple reason that no such reference exists. I suppose someone had told him that these two documents contained a Papal injunction against the pursuit of physical science; that he had swallowed the enormous statement; that he had never read the documents himself, and that, on turning to them, as a result of my challenge, he found that they were quite different from what he had expected.

## Significant.

The incident is of no great magnitude. But is it not significant? Here is a man in the very first rank of the national culture, who is not only ignorant on an elementary point in contemporary history in a matter which covers the whole of our civilisation, but does not think that his ignorance matters!

We may note another very significant and socially important aspect of the thing in the completely wrong notion which nearly every writer and speaker seems to have of what the Catholic attitude is towards any

Simson's  
OUTFITTERS

GIFTS  
For  
MEN & BOYS.

LARGEST SELECTION, LATEST STYLES  
BEST VALUES

Feilding