

THE GREAT HERESIES

by Hilaire Belloc

THE MODERN PHASE

We approach the greatest moment of all. The Faith is now in the presence not of a particular heresy as in the past — the Arian, the Manichean, the Albigensian, the Mohammedan — nor is it in the presence of a sort of generalized heresy as it was when it had to meet the Protestant revolution from three to four hundred years ago. The enemy which the Faith now has to meet, and which may be called "The Modern Attack," is a wholesale assault upon the fundamentals of the Faith — upon the very existence of the Faith. And the enemy now advancing against us is increasingly conscious of the fact that there can be no question of neutrality. The forces now opposed to the Faith design to <destroy>. The battle is henceforward engaged upon a definite line of cleavage, involving the survival or destruction of the Catholic Church. And <all>-not a portion — of its philosophy.

We know, of course, that the Catholic Church cannot be destroyed.

But what we do not know is the extent of the area over which it will survive; its power of revival or the power of the enemy to push it further and further back on to its last defences until it may seem as though anti-Christ had come and the final issue was about to be decided. Of such moment is the struggle immediately before the world.

To many who have no sympathy with Catholicism, who inherit the old Protestant animosity to the Church (although doctrinal Protestantism is now dead) and who think that any attack on the Church must somehow or other be a good thing, the struggle already appears as a coming or present attack on what they call "Christianity."

You will find people saying on every side that the Bolshevist movement (for instance) is "definitely anti-Christian" — "opposed to every form of

Christianity" — and must be "resisted by all Christians irrespective of the particular Church to which each may belong," and so on.

Speech and writing of this kind are futile because they mean nothing definite. There is no such thing as a religion called "Christianity" — there never has been such a religion.

There is and always has been the Church, and various heresies proceeding from a rejection of some of the Church's doctrines by men who still desire to retain the rest of her teaching and morals. But there never has been and never can be or will be a general Christian religion professed by men who all accept some central important doctrines, while agreeing to differ about others. There has always been, from the beginning, and will always be, the Church, and sundry heresies either doomed to decay, or, like Mohammedanism, to grow into a separate religion. Of a common Christianity, there has never been and never can be a definition, for it has never existed.

There is no essential doctrine such that if we can agree upon it we can differ about the rest:

- as for instance, to accept immortality but deny the Trinity. A man will call himself a Christian though he denies the unity of the Christian Church; he will call himself a Christian though he denies the presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament; he will cheerfully call himself a Christian though he denies the Incarnation.

No; the quarrel is between the Church and the anti-Church — the Church of God and anti-God — the Church of Christ and anti-Christ.

The truth is becoming every day so much more obvious that within a few years it will be universally admitted. I do not entitle the modern attack "anti-Christ" — though in my heart I believe that to be the true term for it:

- No, I do not give it that name because it would seem for the moment exaggerated. But the name doesn't matter. Whether we call it "The Modern Attack" or "anti-Christ" it is all one; there is a clear issue now joined between the retention of Catholic morals, tradition, and authority on the one side, and the active effort to destroy them on the other. The modern attack will not tolerate us. It will attempt to destroy us.

Nor can we tolerate it. We must attempt to destroy it as being the fully equipped and ardent enemy of the Truth by which men live.

The duel is to the death.

Men sometimes call the modern attack "a return to Paganism." That definition is true if we mean by paganism a denial of Catholic truth:

- if we mean by Paganism a denial of the Incarnation, of human immortality, of the unity and personality of God, of man's direct responsibility to God, and all that body of thought, feeling, doctrine and culture which is summed up in the word "Catholic," then, and in that sense, the modern attack is a return to Paganism.

But there is more than one Paganism. There was a Paganism out of which we all came — the noble, civilized Paganism of Greece and Rome. There was the barbaric Paganism of the outer savage tribes, German, Slavonic and the rest. There is the degraded Paganism of Africa, the alien and despairing Paganism of Asia. Now since, from all of these, it has been found possible to draw men towards the universal Church, any new Paganism rejecting the Church now known would certainly be quite unlike the Paganisms to which the Church was or is unknown.

A man going uphill may be at the same level as another man going down hill; but they are facing different ways and have different destinies. Our world, passing out of the old Paganism of Greece and Rome towards the

consummation of Christendom and a Catholic civilization from which we all derive, is the very negation of the same world leaving the light of its ancestral religion and sliding back into the dark.

These things being so, let us examine the Modern Attack — the anti-Christian advance — and distinguish its special nature.

We find, to begin with, that it is at once materialist and superstitious.

There is here a contradiction in reason, but the modern phase, the anti-Christian advance, has abandoned reason. It is concerned with the destruction of the Catholic Church and the civilization preceding therefrom. It is not troubled by apparent contradictions within its own body so long as the general alliance is one for the ending of all that by which we have hitherto lived. The modern attack is materialistic because in its philosophy it considers only material causes. It is superstitious only as a by-product of this state of mind. It nourishes on its surface the silly vagaries of spiritualism, the vulgar nonsense of "Christian Science," and heaven knows how many other fantasies. But these follies are bred, not from a hunger for religion, but from the same root as that which has made the world materialist — from an inability to understand the prime truth that faith is at the root of knowledge; from thinking that no truth is appreciable save through direct experience.

Thus the spiritualist boasts of his demonstrable manifestations, and his various rivals of their direct clear proofs; but all are agreed that Revelation is to be denied. It has been well remarked that nothing is more striking than the way in which all the modern quasi-religious practices are agreed upon <this> — that Revelation is to be denied.

We may take it then that the new advance against the Church — what will perhaps prove the final advance against the Church, what is at any rate the only modern enemy of consequence — is fundamentally materialist. It is materialist in its reading of history, and above all in its proposals for social reform.

Being Atheist, it is characteristic of the advancing wave that it repudiates the human reason. Such an attitude would seem again to be a contradiction in terms; for if you deny the value of human reason, if you say that we cannot through our reason arrive at any truth, then not even the affirmation so made can be true. Nothing can be true, and nothing is worth saying. But that great Modern Attack (which is more than a heresy) is indifferent to self-contradiction. It merely affirms. It advances like an animal, counting on strength alone. Indeed, it may be remarked in passing that this may well be the cause of its final defeat; for hitherto reason has always overcome its opponents; and man is the master of the beast through reason.

Anyhow, there you have the Modern Attack in its main character, materialist, and atheist; and, being atheist, it is necessarily indifferent to truth. For God is Truth.

But there is (as the greatest of the ancient Greeks discovered) a certain indissoluble Trinity of Truth, Beauty and Goodness. You cannot deny or attack one of these three without at the same time denying or attacking both the others. Therefore with the advance of this new and terrible enemy against the Faith and all that civilization which the Faith produces, there is coming not only a contempt for beauty but a hatred of it; and immediately upon the heels of this there appears a contempt and hatred for virtue.

The better dupes, the less vicious converts to the enemy, talk vaguely of a "readjustment, a new world, a new order"; but they do not begin by telling us, as in common reason they should, upon what principles this new order is to be raised. They do not define the end they have in view.

Communism (which is only one manifestation, and probably a passing one, of this Modern Attack) professes to be directed towards a certain good, to wit, the abolition of poverty. But it does not tell you why this should be a good; it does not admit that its scheme is also to destroy other things which are also by the common consent of mankind good; the

family, property (which is the guarantee of individual freedom and individual dignity), humour, mercy, and every form of what we consider right living.

Well, give it what name you like, call it as I do here "The Modern Attack," or as I think men will soon have to call it, "Anti-Christ," or call it by the temporary borrowed term of "Bolshevism" (which is only the Russian for "whole hogger"), we know the <thing> well enough. It is <not> the revolt of the oppressed; it is not the rising of the proletariat against capitalist injustice and cruelty; it is something from without, some evil spirit taking advantage of men's distress and of their anger against unjust conditions.

Now that thing is at our gates. Ultimately, of course, it is the fruit of the original break-up of Christendom at the Reformation.

It began in the denial of a central authority, it has ended by telling man that he is sufficient to himself, and it has set up everywhere great idols to be worshipped as gods.

It is not only on the Communist side that this appears, it appears also in the organizations opposed to Communism; in the races and nations where mere force is set in the place of God. These also set up idols which hideous human sacrifice is paid. By these also justice and the right order of things are denied.

Such is the nature of the battle now engaged — and against such enemies the position of the Catholic Church today seems weak indeed.

But there are certain forces in her favour which may lead, after all, to a reaction, whence the power of the Church over mankind may re-arise.

I shall next consider what the immediate results may be of this new great idolatry; and I shall discuss the main question of all. It is this:

whether things point to the Church's becoming an isolated fortress defending itself against great odds, an ark in the midst of a rising flood which, though it does not sink the vessel, covers and destroys all else; or

whether the Church shall perhaps be restored to something of her ancient power.

The Modern Attack on the Catholic Church, the most universal that she has suffered since her foundation, has so far progressed that it has already produced social, intellectual and moral forms which combined give it the savour of a religion.

Though this Modern Attack, as I have said, is not a heresy in the old sense of the word, nor a sort of synthesis of heresies having in common a hatred of the Faith (such as the Protestant movement was), it is even more profound, and its consequences more devastating than any of these. It is essentially atheist, even when the atheism is not overtly predicated. It regards man as sufficient to himself, prayer as mere self-suggestion and — the fundamental point — God as no more than a figment of the imagination, an image of man's self thrown by man on the universe; a phantasm and no reality.

Among his many wise pronouncements the reigning Pope uttered one sentence, the profound judgment of which was most striking at the time and has been powerfully confirmed by events ever since. What he said was that whereas the denial of God had been confined in the past to a comparatively small number of intellectuals, <that denial had now gained the multitude and was acting everywhere as a social force>.

This is the modern enemy; this is that rising flood; the greatest and what may prove to be the final struggle between the Church and the world. We must judge it principally by its fruits; and these fruits, though not yet mature, are already apparent. What are those fruits?

First, we are witnessing a revival of slavery, the necessary result of denying free will when that denial goes one step beyond Calvin and denies responsibility to God as well as lack of power in man. The two forms of slavery which are gradually appearing and will as time goes on be more

and more matured under the effect of the modern attack upon the Faith, are slavery to the State and slavery to private corporations and individuals.

Terms are used so loosely nowadays; there is such a paralysis in the power of definition, that almost any sentence using current phrases may be misinterpreted. If I were to say, "slavery under capitalism," the word "capitalism" would mean different things to different men. It means to one group of writers (what I must confess it means to me when I use it) "the exploitation of the masses of men still free by a few owners of the means of production, transport and exchange." When the mass of men are dispossessed — own nothing — they become wholly dependent upon the owners; and when those owners are in active competition to lower the cost of production the mass of men whom they exploit not only lack the power to order their own lives, but suffer from want and insecurity as well.

But to another man, the term "capitalism" may mean simply the right to private property; yet to another it means industrial capitalism working with machines, and contrasted with agricultural production. I repeat, to get any sense into the discussion, we must have our terms clearly defined.

When the reigning Pope in his Encyclical talked of men reduced "to a condition not far removed from slavery," he meant just what has been said above. When the mass of families in a State are without property, then those who were once citizens become virtually slaves. The more the State steps in to enforce conditions of security and sufficiency; the more it regulates wages, provides compulsory insurance, doctoring, education, and in general takes over the lives of the wage-earners, for the benefit of the companies and men employing the wage-earners, the more is this condition of semi-slavery accentuated. And if it be continued for, say, three generations, it will become so thoroughly established as a social habit and frame of mind that there may be no escape from it in the countries where State Socialism of this kind has been forged and riveted on the body politic.

In Europe, England in particular (but many other countries in a lesser degree) has bound itself to this system. Below a certain level of income a man is guaranteed a bare subsistence should he be out of employment. It is doled out to him by public officials at the expense of losing human dignity. Every circumstance of his family is examined; he is even more in the hands of these officials when out of employment than in the hands of his employer when employed. The thing is still in transition; the mass of men do not yet see to what goal they are tending; but the neglect of human dignity, the potential, if not actual, denial of the doctrine of free will, have led by a natural consequence to what are already semi-servile institutions. These will become fully servile institutions as time goes on.

Now against the evil of wage-slavery there has been long proposed and is now working hard, in actual function, a certain remedy. The briefest name for it is Communism: slavery to the State:

- far more advanced and thorough than the first form, slavery to the capitalist.

Of modern "wage-slavery" one can only talk by metaphor; the man working at a wage is not fully free as is the man possessed of property; he must do as his master tells him, and when his condition is that not of a minority nor even of a limited majority, but of virtually the whole population except a comparatively small capitalist class, the proportion of real freedom in his life dwindles indeed — yet legally it is there. The employee has not yet fallen to the status of the slave even in the most highly industrialized communities. His legal status is still that of a citizen. In theory he is still a free man who has contracted with another man to do a certain amount of work for a certain amount of pay. The man who contracts to pay may or may not be making a profit out of it; the man who contracts to work may or may not receive in wages more than the value of what he produces. But both are technically free.

This first form of social evil produced by the modern spirit is rather a tendency to slavery than actual slavery; you may call it a half slavery, if

you like, where it attaches to vast enterprises — huge factories, monopolist corporations, and so on. But still it is not full slavery.

Now Communism is full slavery. It is the modern enemy working openly, undisguisedly, and at high pressure. Communism denies God, denies the dignity and therefore the freedom of the human soul, and openly enslaves men to what it calls "the State" — but what is in practice a body of favoured officials.

Under full Communism there would be no unemployment, just as there is no unemployment in a prison. Under full Communism there would be no distress or poverty, save where the masters of the nation chose to starve men or give them insufficient clothing, or in any other way oppress them. Communism worked honestly by officials devoid of human frailties and devoted to nothing but the good of its slaves, would have certain manifest material advantages as compared with a proletarian wage-system where millions live in semi-starvation, and many millions more in permanent dread thereof. But even if it were administered thus Communism would only produce its benefits through imposing slavery.

These are the first fruits of the Modern Attack on the social side, the first fruits appearing in the region of the social structure. We came, before the Church was founded, out of a pagan social system in which slavery was everywhere, in which the whole structure of society reposed upon the institution of slavery. With the loss of the Faith we return to that institution again.

Next to the social fruit of the Modern Attack on the Catholic Church is the moral fruit; which extends of course over the whole moral nature of man. And throughout this field its business so far has been to undermine every form of restraint imposed by human experience acting through tradition.

I say, "so far," because in many parts of morals this rapid dissolution of the bonds must lead to a reaction; human society cannot co-exist with

anarchy; new restraints and new customs will arise. Hence those who would point to the modern break-down of sexual morals as the chief effect of the Modern Attack on the Catholic Church are probably in error; for it will not have the most permanent results. Some code, some set of morals, must, in the nature of things, arise; even if the old code is on this point destroyed. But there are other evil effects, which may prove more permanent.

Now to find out what these effects may be, we have a guide. We can consider how men of our blood carried on before the Church created Christendom. What we chiefly discover is this:-

- That in the realm of morals one thing stands out, the unquestioned prevalence of cruelty in the unbaptized world. Cruelty will be the chief fruit in the moral field of the Modern Attack, just as the revival of slavery will be the chief fruit in the social field.

Here the critic may ask whether cruelty were not more the note of Christian men in the past than it is today. Is not all the history of our two thousand years a history of armed conflict, massacre, judicial tortures and horrible executions, the sack of towns, and all the rest of it?

The reply to this objection is that there is a capital distinction between cruelty exceptional, and cruelty the rule. When men apply cruel punishments, depend on physical power to obtain effects, let loose violence in the passions of war, if all this is done in violation of their own accepted morals, it is one thing; if it is done as part of a whole mental attitude taken for granted, it is another.

Therein lies the radical distinction between this new, modern, cruelty and the sporadic cruelty of earlier Christian times. Not cruel vengeance, nor cruelty in excitement, nor cruelty in punishment against acknowledged evil, nor cruelty in repression of what admittedly must be repressed, is the fruit of an evil philosophy; though such things are excesses or sins they do not come from false doctrine. But the cruelty which accompanies the

modern abandonment of our ancestral religion is a cruelty native to the Modern Attack; a cruelty which is part of its philosophy.

The proof lies in this:

- that men are not shocked at cruelty but indifferent to it. The abominations of the revolution in Russia, extended to those in Spain, are an example in point. Not only did people on the spot receive the horror with indifference, but distant observers do so. There is no universal cry of indignation, there is no sufficient protest, because there is no longer in force the conception that man as man is something sacred. That same force which ignores human dignity also ignores human suffering.

I say again, the Modern Attack on the Faith will have in the moral field a thousand evil fruits, and of these many are apparent today, but the characteristic one, the one presumably the most permanent, is the institution everywhere of cruelty accompanied by a contempt for justice.

The last category of fruits by which we may judge the character of the Modern Attack consists in the fruit it bears in the field of the intelligence — what it does to human reason.

When the Modern Attack was gathering, a couple of lifetimes ago, while it was still confined to a small number of academic men, the first assault upon reason began. It seemed to make but little progress outside a restricted circle. The plain man and his common-sense (which are the strongholds of reason) were not affected. Today they are.

But reason today is everywhere decried. The ancient process of conviction by argument and proof is replaced by reiterated affirmation; and almost all the terms which were the glory of reason carry with them now an atmosphere of contempt.

See what has happened for instance to the word "logic," to the word "controversy"; note such popular phrases as "No one yet was ever

convinced by argument," or again, "Anything may be proved," or "That may be all right in logic, but in practice it is very different." The speech of men is becoming saturated with expressions which everywhere connote contempt for the use of the intelligence.

But the Faith and the use of the intelligence are inextricably bound up. The use of reason is a main part — or rather the foundation — of all inquiry into the highest things. It was precisely because reason was given this divine authority that the Church proclaimed mystery—that is, admitted reason to have its limits. It had to be so, lest the absolute powers ascribed to reason should lead to the exclusion of truths which the reason might accept but could not demonstrate. Reason was limited by mystery only more to enhance the sovereignty of reason in its own sphere.

When reason is dethroned, not only is Faith dethroned (the two subversions go together) but every moral and legitimate activity of the human soul is dethroned at the same time. There is no God. So the words "God is Truth" which the mind of Christian Europe used as a postulate in all it did, cease to have meaning. None can analyse the rightful authority of government nor set bounds to it. In the absence of reason, political authority reposing on mere force is boundless. And reason is thus made a victim because Humanity itself is what the Modern Attack is destroying in its false religion of humanity. Reason being the crown of man and at the same time his distinguishing mark, the Anarchs march against reason as their principle enemy.

So the Modern Attack develops and works. What does it presage for the future? That is the practical, the immediate question we all have to face. The attack is by this time sufficiently developed for us to make some calculation of what the next phase may be. What doom will fall on us?

Or, again, by what good reaction shall we benefit? On that doubt I will conclude.

The Modern Attack is far more advanced than is generally appreciated. It is always so with great movements in the story of mankind. It is yet another case of a "time-lag." A power upon the eve of victory appears to be but half-way to its goal — even perhaps to be checked. A power in the full spring of its early energy appears to contemporaries to be a small precarious experiment.

The modern attack on the Faith (the latest and most formidable of all) has advanced so far that we can already affirm one all-important point quite clearly:

- of two things one must happen, one of two results must become definite throughout the modern world. Either the Catholic Church (now rapidly becoming the only place wherein the traditions of civilization are understood and defended) will be reduced by her modern enemies to political impotence, to numerical insignificance, and, so far as public appreciation goes, to silence; or the Catholic Church will, in this case as throughout the past, react more strongly against her enemies than her enemies have been able to react against her; she will recover and extend her authority, and will rise once more to the leadership of civilization which she made, and thus recover and restore the world.

In a word, either we of the Faith shall become a small persecuted neglected island amid mankind, or we shall be able to lift at the end of the struggle the old battle-cry, "<Christus Imperat>!"

The normal human conclusion in such conflicts — that one or the other combatant will be overwhelmed and will disappear, cannot be accepted. The Church will not disappear, for the Church is not of mortal stuff; it is the only institution among men not subject to the universal law of mortality. Therefore we say, not that the Church may be wiped out, but that it may be reduced to a small band almost forgotten amid the vast numbers of its opponents and their contempt of the defeated thing.

Neither is the alternative acceptable. For though indeed this great modern movement (which so singularly resembles the advance of Anti-Christ) may be repelled, and may even lose its characteristics and die as Protestantism has died before our very own eyes, yet that will not be the end of the conflict. This <may> be the final conflict. There <may> be a dozen more to come, or a hundred. But attack upon the Catholic Church there will always be, and never will the quarrel of men know <complete> unity, peace and high nobility through the <complete> victory of the Faith. For if that were so the World would not be the World nor Jesus Christ at the issue with the World.

But though not in their entirety, yet in the main, one of those two fates must come, Catholic or Anti-Christian victory. The Modern Attack is so universal and moving so rapidly that men now very young will surely live to see something like a decision in this great battle.

Certain of the most acute modern observers in the last generation and in this have used their intelligence to discover which way fate should fall. One of the most intelligent of French Catholics, a converted Jew, has written a work to prove (or suggest) that the first of these two possible issues will be our fate. He envisages the last years of the Church on this earth as lived apart. He sees a Church of the future reduced to very few in numbers and left on one side in the general current of the new Paganism. He sees a Church of the future within which there will be intensity of devotion, indeed, but that devotion practised by one small body, isolated and forgotten in the midst of its fellowmen.

The late Robert Hugh Benson wrote two books, each remarkable and each envisaging one of the opposite possibilities. In the first, "The Lord of the World," he presents the picture of the Church reduced to a little wandering band, returning as it were to its origins, the Pope at the head of the Twelve — and a conclusion on the Day of Judgement. In the second he envisages the full restoration of the Catholic thing — our civilization re-established, reinvigorated, once more seated and clothed in its right mind; because in

that new culture, though filled with human imperfection, the Church will have recovered her leadership of men and will inform the spirit of society with proportion and beauty once more.

What are the arguments to be advanced on either side? On what grounds should we conclude for a tendency one way or the other?

For the first issue (the dwindling of Catholic influence, the restriction of our numbers and political value to the edge of extinction) there is to be noted the increasing ignorance of the world about us, coupled with the loss of those faculties whereby men might appreciate what Catholicism means and take advantage of their salvation. The level of culture, including a sense of the past, sinks visibly. With each decade the level is lower than the last. In that decline tradition is breaking away and melting like a snow-drift at the end of winter. Great lumps of it fall off at one moment and another, melt, and disappear.

Within our generation the supremacy of the classics has gone. You find men upon every side possessed of power who have forgotten that from which we all came; men, to whom Greek and Latin, the fundamental languages of our civilization, are incomprehensible, or at best curiosities. Old men now living can remember uneasy rebellion against tradition; but young men only perceive for themselves how little there is left against which to rebel, and many fear that before they die the body of tradition will have disappeared.

That mood of faith has been largely ruined, ruined certainly for the greater part of men, all will admit. So true is this that already a majority (I should affirm it to be a very large majority) do not know what the word faith means. For most men who hear it (in connection with religion) it signifies either blind acceptance of irrational statements and of legends which common experience condemns, or a mere inherited habit of mental pictures which have never been tested and which at the first touch of reality dissolve like the dreams they are. The whole vast body of apologetics, the whole science of theology (the Queen exalted above

every other science) have for the mass of modern men ceased to be. If you but mention their titles you give an effect of unreality and insignificance.

We have already arrived at this strange pass — that while the Catholic body (which is now already <in practice> a minority even in the white civilization) understands its opponents, her opponents do not understand the Catholic Church.

The historian might draw a parallel between the diminishing pagan body of the fourth and fifth centuries, and the Catholic body of today. The pagans, especially the educated and cultivated pagans, who then lived on in smaller and smaller numbers, knew well the high traditions to which they were attached and understood (although they hated) this new thing, the Church, which had grown up among them and was about to dispossess them. But the Catholics who were to supplant the pagans understood less and less of the pagan mood, neglected its great works of art, and took its gods for demons. So today the ancient religion is respected but ignored.

Those nations which are by tradition anti-Catholic, which were once Protestant and have now no fixed traditions, have been so long in the ascendant that they regard their Catholic opponents as finally beaten. Those nations which had retained the Catholic culture are now in the third generation of anti-Catholic social education. Their institutions may tolerate the Church, but are never in active alliance with it and often in acute hostility.

Judged by all the parallels of history and by the general laws which govern the rise and decay of organisms, one might conclude that the active <role> of Catholicism in the things of the world was over; that in the future, perhaps in the near future, Catholicism would perish.

The Catholic observer would deny the possibility of the Church's complete extinction. But he must also follow historical parallels; he also must accept the general laws governing the growth and decay of organisms, and he must tend, in view of all the change that has passed in

the mind of man, to draw the tragic conclusion that our civilization, which has already largely ceased to be Christian, will lose its general Christian tone altogether. The future to envisage is a pagan future, and a future pagan with a new and repulsive form of paganism, but none the less powerful and omnipresent for all its repulsiveness.

Now on the other side there are considerations less obvious, but appealing strongly to the thoughtful and learned in things past and in experience of human nature.

First of all there is the fact that all through the centuries the Church has reacted strongly towards her own resurrection in moments of deepest peril.

The Mohammedan struggle was a very close thing; it nearly swamped us; only the armed reaction in Spain, followed by the Crusades, prevented the full triumph of Islam. The onslaught of the barbarian, of the northern pirates, of the Mongol hordes, brought Christendom to within an ace of destruction. Yet the northern pirates were tamed, defeated and baptized by force. The barbarism of the eastern nomads was eventually defeated; very tardily, but not too late to save what could be saved. The movement called the Counter-Reformation met the hitherto triumphant advance of the sixteenth-century heretics. Even the Rationalism of the eighteenth century was, in its own place and time, checked and repelled. It is true that it bred something worse than itself; something from which we now suffer. But there was reaction against it; and that reaction was sufficient to keep the Church alive and even to recover for it elements of power which had been thought lost forever.

Reaction there will always be; and there is about Catholic reaction a certain vitality, a certain way of appearing with unexpected force through new men and new organizations. History and the general law of organic rise and decay lead on their largest lines to the first conclusion, the rapid withering of Catholicism in the world; but observation as applied to the particular case of the Catholic Church does not lead to such a conclusion.

The Church seems to have an organic, a native, life quite unusual: a mode of being unique, and powers of recrudescence peculiar to herself.

Next, let this very interesting point be noted: the more powerful, the more acute, and the more sensitive minds of our time are clearly inclining toward the Catholic side.

They are of course of their nature a small minority, but they are a minority of a sort very powerful in human affairs. The future is not decided for men by public vote; it is decided by the growth of ideas. When the few men who can think best and feel most strongly and who have mastery of expression begin to show a novel tendency towards this or that, then this or that bids fair to dominate the future.

Of this new tendency to sympathize with Catholicism — and in the case of strong characters to take the risk, to accept the Faith, and proclaim themselves the defenders of it — there can be no doubt. Even in England, where the traditional feeling against Catholicism is so universal and so strong, and where the whole life of the nation is bound up with hostility to the Faith, the conversions which strike the public eye are continually the conversions of men who lead in thought; and note that for one who openly admits conversion there are ten at least who turn their faces toward the Catholic way, who prefer the Catholic philosophy and its fruit to any others, but who shrink from accepting the heavy sacrifices involved in a public avowal.

Lastly there is this very important and perhaps decisive consideration:

- <though the social strength of Catholicism, in numbers certainly, and in most other factors as well, is declining throughout the world; the issue, as between Catholicism and the completely new pagan thing (the destruction of all tradition, the breaking with our inheritance), is now clearly marked.>

There is not, as there was even quite a short time ago, a confused and heterogeneous margin or penumbra which could talk with confidence of

itself under the vague title of "Christian," and speak confidently of some imaginary religion called "Christianity." No. There are today already almost quite distinct and sharing the field between them, soon to be as markedly exposed as black and white, the Catholic Church on one side, and on the other opponents of what has hitherto been our civilization.

The ranks have lined up as for a battle; and though such clear division does not mean that the one or the other antagonist will conquer, it does mean that a plain issue is defined at last; and in plain issues a good cause, like a bad one, has a better chance than in confusion.

Even the most misguided or the most ignorant of men, talking vaguely of "Churches," are now using a language that rings hollow. The last generation could talk, in Protestant countries at least, of "the Churches." The present generation cannot. There are not many churches; there is one, it is the Catholic Church on the one side and its mortal enemy on the other. The lists are set.

Thus are we now in the presence of the most momentous question that has yet been presented to the mind of man. Thus are we placed at a dividing of the ways, upon which the whole future of our race will turn.