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Chancellor's Update

Whither Christian Civilization?

As described in previous issues of the Chancellor's Update, in 1937 Hilaire Belloc praised the Christian civilization of Western Europe and even identified Western Europe as Christian civilization. Even after suffering the massive rupture of the Protestant Revolt, until the late 18th Century the mass of Europe and the colonies in America still lived by the accepted conduct of the Faith. In such circumstances Belloc states that a writer need not be Catholic, 'he need only be in sympathy with that culture though hardly belonging to it, to spread through whatever he writes upon the past or the present, the savor of Catholicism.' He continues, "'The Catholic Church made the culture which we still precariously inherit, the whole civilization in which our ancestry developed, lived fully, and wherein we partially and uncertainly live today...Understand that the Catholic Church made Europe and through Europe the societies which Europe has founded beyond the seas.'

What basically is culture? One dictionary defines it as "'The training, improvement and refinement of mind, morals, or taste.'" A more modern dictionary describes it as "the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties esp. by education; enlightenment and excellence of taste acquired by intellectual and aesthetic training; a particular stage of advancement in civilization; the characteristic features of such a stage or state."

A few years ago, Oriana Fallaci, a Florentine, a journalist, who lives mostly in New York, echoed Belloc's sentiments in *The Rage and The Pride*. "I am an atheist. I am anticlerical. I have a lot in common with the Catholic Church. I was born in a landscape of domes, monasteries, Christs, Madonnas, Saints, crosses, bells. The first music I heard when I came into this world was the music of the bells: the Santa Maria del Fiore Cathedral's bells. In that landscape, that Church to which even great minds like Dante Alighieri and Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo and Galileo Galilei bent, I have grown up. Through it I have learnt what sculpture and architecture and painting and poetry and literature are, what beauty combined with knowledge is. Thanks to it I began to ask myself what is Good, what is Evil, if God exists." She continues that in spite of her laicism, anticlericalism and atheism, she is imbued with Catholic culture that it fills her written and spoken language. In spite of the notorious actions of Catholics and the Church throughout history, "The music of the bells caresses my heart. I like it so. I also like those beautifully painted Christs and Madonnas and Saints." She continues that abbeys, cloisters and monasteries give her a sense of serenity that makes her envy those who live inside. "Let's face it: our Cathedrals are beautiful." Other houses of worship have "not a Jesus, not a Madonna, not an angel, not a saint, not a candle, a silver, and no incense." She regards these as "the things, the symbolic frills, which belonged to my life. To my culture." Like Belloc she longs to hold on to her Italian (read Catholic) cultural identity of almost two thousand years. "Making room for non-Christian things would be like deleting our identity, like nullifying our accomplishments."

Today's political Italy is not her Italy. She laments copying from America its consumer society and its hedonism, specifically, "the cult of enjoyment, comfort, pleasure, and...liberty (licentiousness)." She states that freedom concerns itself with discipline or self-discipline. Rights carry Duties. She laments that young people "fill themselves with drugs, spend Saturday nights in discotheques, and wear overly expensive blue jeans." Some in the new culture "exploit their parents in avoiding work" and

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pretend to be revolutionaries working for freedom and democracy. Perhaps this explains the availability of jobs in Italy for Moslem immigrants. She complains also about pseudo-intellectuals and jet setters who ignore the culture of the Gospels and instead promote political correctness, a fad that "in the name of Equality denies merit and success, value and competition." This fad, for example, "calls school janitors 'non-teaching personnel'."

She reminds other Europeans, that their countries really belong to one great family with similar faults, cowardices, hypocrisies, blindness, deafness, lack of wisdom and masochism. She condemns licentiousness concealed as liberty and bemoans the ignorance and the lack of leadership that allows the Moslem invasion. She ridicules their Financial Club called the European Union, which forces all members to use 'the rhetorical nonsense called Common Currency'.

Having lived through World War II, when Europeans had pitilessly slaughtered each other, she longed so very much for a united Europe. "I sighed: We must unite, we must make Europe!" However, the Financial Club with its Common Currency, its silly populist fads, and its reaching out to other cultures ignores her beautiful language, and sacrifices her national identity, it is not the Europe she and her father, who supported the Allies, dreamed of as they chanted, "'Europe-Europe'. It is not Europe. It is the suicide of Europe."

In this she echoes Hilaire Belloc, who in an earlier time warned us Catholics to restore Catholicism or witness the extinction of our culture.

A few years ago, United Press International reported that Pope John Paul II wants European governments to recognize publicly the Christian roots of the European Union, specifically, "a strong reference to Christianity included in the preamble to the European Union's Constitution". The Vatican wants the document to recognize 'Christianity's fundamental role in shaping European culture'. The European Union, which promotes its economic and political aspects, makes no apparent reference to religion. It is concerned about the presence of so many Muslims in Europe and about the question of admitting as a new member, Turkey, a secular but Muslim state. Some predominantly Catholic countries do not officially declare themselves Catholic.

The Pope wants the 'extraordinary religious, cultural and civic heritage that has made Europe great throughout the centuries' to continue in the new European house. "If one wants to give durable stability to Europe's new unity, it is necessary to ensure that it rests on those ethical foundations which were once at its base, making space at the same time for the richness and diversity of the cultures and traditions that characterize individual nations," he said. However, officials at the EU do not expect the pontiff's request to be honored. One official said that the Vatican needs to view "Europe as missionary territory."

What then needs to be done? Quoting Roman Catholic historian Christopher Dawson, contemporary Christian activist Chuck Colson reminds us, "The church has been the soul of Western civilization." Its role today is to "provide culture with a new sense of moral vision." In his book *Against the Night* Colson continues, "When the church transcends culture, it can transform culture." By remaining independent from culture it can best affect culture. He says that the church must be the church. It must see its identity in Jesus Christ, it must be committed to biblical obedience, it must be repentant (seeing itself and its members as a people who are sinful, needy, and dependent in relation to God, who is awesome, holy and majestic), and it must be holy. By living the values of God's kingdom the church becomes God's missionary to culture. If this is done, perhaps then Europe, along with the societies that it founded, will reclaim its Christian culture.

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