

EUROPE AND THE FAITH

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Europe and the Faith by Hilaire Belloc

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HILAIRE BELLOC

**EUROPE AND
THE FAITH**

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"Sine auctoritate nulla vita"

BY

HILAIRE BELLOC

SECOND EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

THE CATHOLIC CONSCIENCE OF HISTORY

I say the Catholic "conscience" of history—I say "conscience"—that is, an intimate knowledge through identity: the intuition of a thing which is one with the knower—I do not say "The Catholic Aspect of History." This talk of "aspects" is modern and therefore part of a decline: it is false, and therefore ephemeral: I will not stoop to it. I will rather do homage to truth and say that there is no such thing as a Catholic "aspect" of European history. There is a Protestant aspect, a Jewish aspect, a Mohammedan aspect, a Japanese aspect, and so forth. For all of these look on Europe from without. The Catholic sees Europe from within. There is no more a Catholic "aspect" of European history than there is a man's "aspect" of himself.

Sophistry does indeed pretend that there is even a man's "aspect" of himself. In nothing does false philosophy prove itself more false. For a man's way of perceiving himself (when he does so honestly and after a cleansing examination of his mind) is in line with his Creator's, and therefore with reality: he sees from within.

Let me pursue this metaphor. Man has in him conscience, which is the voice of God. Not only does he know by this that the outer world is real, but also that his own personality is real.

When a man, although flattered by the voice of

another, yet says within himself, "I am a mean fellow," he has hold of reality. When a man, though malign'd of the world, says to himself of himself, "My purpose was just," he has hold of reality. He knows himself, for he is himself. A man does not know an infinite amount about himself. But the finite amount he does know is all in the map; it is all part of what is really there. What he does not know about himself would, did he know it, fit in with what he does know about himself. There are indeed "aspects" of a man for all others except these two, himself and God Who made him. These two, when they regard him, see him as he is; all other minds have their several views of him; and these indeed are "aspects," each of which is false, while all differ. But a man's view of himself is not an "aspect:" it is a comprehension.

Now then, so it is with us who are of the Faith and the great story of Europe. A Catholic as he reads that story does not grope at it from without, he understands it from within. He cannot understand it altogether because he is a finite being; but he is also that which he has to understand. The Faith is Europe and Europe is the Faith.

The Catholic brings to history (when I say "history" in these pages I mean the history of Christendom) self-knowledge. As a man in the confessional accuses himself of what he knows to be true and what other people cannot judge, so a Catholic, talking of the united European civilization, when he blames it, blames it for motives and for acts which are his own. He himself could have done those things in person. He is not relatively right in his blame, he is absolutely right. As a man can testify to his own motive so can the Catholic testify to unjust, irrelevant, or ignorant

conceptions of the European story; for he knows why and how it proceeded. Others, not Catholic, look upon the story of Europe externally as strangers. *They* have to deal with something which presents itself to them partially and disconnectedly, by its phenomena alone: *he* sees it all from its centre in its essence, and together.

I say again, renewing the terms, The Church is Europe: and Europe is The Church.

The Catholic conscience of history is not a conscience which begins with the development of the Church in the basin of the Mediterranean. It goes back much further than that. The Catholic understands the soil in which that plant of the Faith arose. In a way that no other man can, he understands the Roman military effort; why that effort clashed with the gross Asiatic and merchant empire of Carthage; what we derived from the light of Athens; what food we found in the Irish and the British, the Gallic tribes, their dim but awful memories of immortality; what cousinship we claim with the ritual of false but profound religions, and even how ancient Israel (the little violent people, before they got poisoned, while they were yet National in the mountains of Judea) was, in the old dispensation at least, central and (as we Catholics say) sacred: devoted to a peculiar mission.

For the Catholic the whole perspective falls into its proper order. The picture is normal. Nothing is distorted to him. The procession of our great story is easy, natural, and full. It is also final.

But the modern Catholic, especially if he is confined to the use of the English tongue, suffers from a deplorable (and it is to be hoped), a passing accident. No modern book in the English tongue