

Fascism and British Catholic Writers 1924—1939: Part 2

Kevin L. Morris

One of the best guides through the territory of the pro-Fascist sympathies of the British Catholic literati is Robert Speaight, who, in his biography of Belloc and his autobiography, achieved a dispassionate view of 1930s English Catholicism, while making no secret of his own moderate temperamental inclination to the Right, even admitting to having been attracted to Action Française. Speaking of the 1930s Catholic intelligentsia he remarks:

It was characteristic of a common train of thought that one of the most interesting ventures of [the Catholic publisher] Sheed and Ward was entitled *Essays in Order*; and that *Order* was the name of a . . . [Catholic] magazine . . . we were so impatient with the shibboleths of the Left that the sophistries of the Right . . . left us relatively undisturbed. The mystique of 'order' was worked for considerably more than it was worth, with an illegitimate extrapolation from the theological to the political field.

He refers to both the influence of continental Rightists and that of the Church in teaching Catholics to fear Communism. Of Belloc he observes he had 'nothing but contempt for the representative government. . . he seemed to think that, on the whole, fascism was a good thing for foreigners.' Of the Catholic publisher and author Douglas Jerrold, whom the atheist pro-Fascist Wyndham Lewis described as 'the brains of the English Right', Speaight comments:

It would be a gross abuse of language to describe Jerrold as a fascist, but he was so obsessed with the chaos of industrial capitalism and the corrupt ineptitude of parliamentary democracy that he was indulgent to fascism wherever it reared its head . . . Perfectly sincere in his desire for liberty, he challenged the liberals with the self-evident truth that you can only have liberty within a closed moral order.

He suggests Jerrold was influenced by Belloc, and Jerrold himself virtually declared this influence. He also suggests Jerrold learned from Dawson, whom 'he expected . . . to echo the sentiments of the Catholic Right' when, in 1940, he appointed him editor of the Catholic periodical the *Dublin Review*:

Jerrold was still fighting the Spanish Civil War ... [and] Dawson had supported Franco. So had Cardinal Hinsley, who had a photograph of the Caudillo on his writing-table ... For Jerrold international Communism was still the ultimate enemy, and he resented the appearance in the *Dublin Review* of articles on Maritain and Bernanos who did not share his views on the 'last Crusader'. Dawson could still see traces of original virtue in Liberalism, where Jerrold could see none ... Eventually he ousted Dawson from the editorial chair in a manoeuvre that was anything but pretty, and I was left to hold the fort ...

Subsequently (he adds self-exoneratingly) 'a number of eyebrows ... were raised at my blatant apologia for the Fighting French at a time when Pétainist illusions still lingered in the minds of Right-thinking people.'³⁵ This is damning evidence, because Dawson was ousted as late as, 1944, when the depredations of the Nazi-Fascist axis were evident to all.

Speaight's detail of the photograph is correct, and is part of a pattern. On 28 March 1939 Hinsley wrote to Franco, thanking him for a signed photograph: 'I look upon you,' he wrote, 'as the great defender of the true Spain, the country of Catholic principles where social justice and charity will be applied for the common good under a firm peace-loving government.'³⁶ In England there was an official 'Bishops Fund for Aid for the Spanish Nationalists', and in October 1936 the bishops officially extended their sympathy to the Francoists. As soon as the Spanish Republic was ensconced in early 1931, the Archbishop of Toledo declared 'holy war' on it in a pastoral letter urging Catholics to arms; in September 1936 the Pope described the Spanish Nationalists as Christian heroes: and the Bishop of Salamanca pictured the Republican zone as the City of Man, the Nationalist as the City of God. The Spanish episcopacy endorsed Franco in a joint pastoral of 1937. Catholics were led to believe that Franco was fighting a Catholic crusade against godless Communism and Anarchism, while the realities of Francoist friendship with Hitler, atrocities and less-than-Christian objectives were not an issue for them. Yet in 1939 Hinsley delivered a speech on liberty: 'it is inexplicable' he exclaimed with apparent ingenuousness, 'how English Catholics can wisely and safely adopt the label "Fascist," no

matter how they modify its meaning as made clear by leaders of Fascism in other lands': rather suggesting that Catholics did identify themselves as Fascists, albeit in an evasive manner. Just because the Church was anti-Communist, Hinsley emphasized, did not mean that she was pro-Fascist. Intriguingly, one can detect the ghost of ecclesiastical ambivalence in the tone of the words, written during the War, of his clerical biographer and associate John Heenan, who cites this speech. Hinsley, he relates, 'knew both the good and evil in Fascism'; then Heenan insists on 'the many advantages which came to Italy after the [Fascist] March on Rome', declaring that 'Italian Fascism was incomparably the best system of Government ever to rule a United Italy.'³⁷ There is an illuminating contrast with De la Bedoyère, writing at about the same time, observing from his more progressive point of view that in Spain and Italy the Church 'has paid a heavy price in accepting without opposition the ascendant political philosophy'; and that 'the degree of Catholic acceptance of a State order and policy in so many respects thoroughly non-Christian, and even completely amoral, has been anything but reassuring.'³⁸

The Catholic policy of 'political neutrality' was exemplified by the most prominent clerical voice of his day, Ronald Knox, a friend and admirer of Belloc and Chesterton. His overriding principle was, as he expressed it, 'a free Church in a free State', believing that 'the Church is quite prepared to leave politics alone when politics will be content to leave the Church alone.' Correlatively, when he himself said something explicit against Nazism, in the pamphlet *Nazi and Nazarene* (1940), he picked a quarrel with it not so much because of what it was politically, but because it had infringed the rights of the Church: i.e. it had mixed religion with politics. Nevertheless—as with so many Catholics who thought the Church should keep out of politics—he was personally basically politically conservative; and consequently, when, in 1937, he preached on the Spanish Civil War, he declared: 'Was General Franco justified in plunging his country into the certain horrors of civil war to avoid the possible horrors of a Communist or an anarchist dictatorship? For myself I don't think there is any doubt that he was.'³⁹ Thus spoke the voice of orthodoxy in England.

Nor was Knox's the only clerical voice instructing English Catholics in Franco's favour. In 1936 the Jesuit periodical *The Month* produced a no-nonsense article on the Spanish Civil War, which was, asserted its author, a black-and-white affair, the only reason for English society favouring the Republicans being that it was the dupe of Communist propaganda, for the Republicans represented 'the imported Communism of Slav and Jew', whose object was the overthrow of

religion, especially in its Catholic form. Liberalism was sympathetic to Communism, and its parliamentary regime had failed to maintain order: hence the reaction towards 'Fascism' (which term he rejects, as a Liberal form of abuse), which was essentially anti-Marxist and anti-revolution, and therefore pro-God and pro-order, and defensible because it was not élitist. but rather national, populist and broadly-based, with a social programme 'nearer to the left than to the right'. Nazism and Fascism were therefore understandable, even commendable, despite their anti-libertarianism and anti-individualism, and their idolatrous and violent tendencies.⁴⁰ With such attitudes emanating from the institutional Church, it was not surprising that Catholic writers should tend to be pro-Fascist.

If, as Speaight claimed, Jerrold was not a Fascist, he was certainly pro-Franco. He declared his admiration for the Fascist leader Mosley, and was even drawn to Hitler. He described his part in getting Franco into position to unleash the Civil War in his autobiography, where he refers to 'the generals who saved Spain, and Europe, in July 1936', and hails Franco as 'a supremely good man, a hero possibly: possibly a saint.'⁴¹ In 1930 he had published *Storm over Europe*, a pro-Fascist fantasy, in which the Church allies itself to the Right; and he edited *The English Review* (1930-36), to which right-wing Catholics contributed, and which disseminated his ideas: it was the only not specifically Catholic magazine prepared to print articles supporting Mussolini. In *The Necessity of Freedom* (1938) he explained that Fascism was essentially a revolt against the corruption, incapacity and impotence of the Liberal western democracies, but was not necessarily anti-democratic; and asserted that 'there is no necessary and invariable Christian attitude to Fascism.'⁴² Jerrold's friend Arnold Lunn, another student of Belloc and Chesterton, while denying he was a Fascist, and espousing the politics of 'the little man' against corporations and states, vigorously espoused the Francoist cause. He went to Spain to gain material for his work of Francoist propaganda *Spanish Rehearsal* (1937), which presses his thesis that Communism was 'the final form of the servile state'.⁴³ For him it was 'essentially a war between the Catholic and Communist cultures.'⁴⁴

And like Belloc, Roy Campbell had leanings towards Jewish-Bolshevik-Masonic conspiracy theories, in which context Spanish Republicanism was sometimes viewed. In 1934 Campbell published an autobiographical volume, *Broken Record*, in which he expressed his Fascist sympathies: and he openly espoused that side at the same time he decided to become a Catholic. In 1939 came his *The Flowering Rifle*, a poetic eulogy of Franco as the upholder of Christian values, in which

he made a fanciful claim to have fought for him. The leading Catholic weekly *The Tablet* published his anti-Semitic, pro-Franco poem 'A Legionary Speaks'.⁴⁵ In 1951 came the autobiographical *Light on a Dark Horse*, in which (chapter 22) he claims to have seen from the beginning that in Spain 'there could be no compromise in this war between the East and the West, between Credulity and Faith, between irresponsible innovation ... and tradition, between the emotions ... and the intelligence'.

If vocal Catholics tended to minimize the negative aspects of Fascism, Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia, which caused outrage in England, constituted a moral quantity which could not be easily ignored. The Pope, however, did not condemn it, and Bernard Wall reported that the Italian Catholic press 'seems strongly in favour of the conquest of Abyssinia, which most Italian Catholics, from the hierarchy downwards, seem to view as a missionary enterprise.'⁴⁶ Michael de la Bedoyère was reluctant to blame Catholics in any respect over the war: in effect, he aligns himself with the 'many Catholic apologists' who were forced by the war (as he remarks) 'to dig themselves deeper than ever into a Fascistising philosophy in order to provide consistent justification for the Church's attitude.' He gives the impression that Italy was not especially responsible for the war, that Vatican silence looked worse than it was due to the prevalence of Dawnist attitudes (which were also partly responsible for the war), and that criticism of the Church would only have given succour to Catholicism's enemies.⁴⁷

Christopher Hollis, a disciple of Belloc, Chesterton and Woodruff, commented retrospectively on the affair. A Francoist for the sake of religion, he recalled that, though he himself had not known enough at the time to condemn Italian Fascism, and had thought the Pope right to reserve judgment on it, 'on the Abyssinian war the issue was clear. Yet no clear word came either from the Vatican or from the Italian bishops. The bishops were indeed far worse than the Vatican.'⁴⁸ In fact, Catholics *were* capable of seeing that this aggression was bad: the very conservative editor of *The Tablet*, Ernest Oldmeadow, declared of the assault that 'our only comfort is that Italians are just now acting not under Christian leaders, but under a totalitarian Dictator who harks back to pagan Rome for his inspiration, and has deliberately chosen the pre-Christian fasces to be the emblems of his rule.'⁴⁹

On the other hand, Evelyn Waugh supported Italy. He could almost have written the *Catholic Herald's* editorial of 11 October 1935—he did sometimes write for the paper—which said that Abyssinia was not worth fighting for because it was so corrupt; and that, anyway, 'Fascism ... has a positive and constructive aspect, including corporativism, that is

thoroughly Catholic.’ Waugh, one of the tiny minority of leading English writers to back Franco, acquired a reputation as a pro-Fascist and deprecated the propagandist inflation of what he called the Fascist ‘bogy’, which he thought derived from Communists. He was impressed by Mussolini when he met him in 1936. In *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936) he said that the barbarous Abyssinian people were so worthless that the culturally superior Italy had a right, even a duty, to conquer them. The *Tablet* and Chesterton’s *GK’s Weekly* carried pre-publication chunks of this book, in which he says that the complaints of ‘the Liberals’ about the invasion are merely ‘the peevish whinny of the nonconformist conscience’: the Italians, labouring like slaves, were treating Abyssinia as a place ‘to be fertilised and cultivated and embellished’. The occupation ‘is being attended by the spread of order and decency, education and medicine, in a disgraceful place, but it is not primarily a humane movement’: it was rather bringing ‘the inestimable gifts of fine workmanship and clear judgment—the two determining qualities of the human spirit, by which alone, under God, man grows and flourishes.’⁵⁰

It was a curious way for a Christian to look at an act of blatant and remorseless aggression by the strong against the weak, which was not only gratuitous and illegal but from the outset steeped in wilful atrocity. (According to one authority, his ‘entire account of the war ... was so provably inaccurate and so openly biased in favour of Italy that his testimony could not be taken as any more factual than his very entertaining novels.’)⁵¹ The book was approved by the Catholic press, though by few others: *The Tablet* (now under Woodruff) thought it would counter anti-Italian propaganda about the horrors of their war, and advised all those who ‘indulge in violent orgies of emotional indignation’ to read it.⁵²

In the Catholic Press anti-Fascist statements were scarce. Arnold Lunn recorded that Neville Chamberlain was reported to have told Sir Martin Melvin, the proprietor of the Catholic weekly *The Universe*, that ‘if it had not been for the Catholics he might have been forced to take steps which would have been extremely embarrassing to the Nationalists [in Spain]. The Catholic Press in general, and Douglas Woodruff of *The Tablet* in particular, rendered immense services to the Christian cause in Spain.’ Jerrold’s articles in the *English Review* and *Nineteenth Century*, Lunn added, ‘helped to steady Conservative opinion’.⁵³ One authority has observed how ‘atrocities stories about sex-crazed, looting Spanish anarchists were spread by British Catholic supporters of the Nationalists. Through the Right Book Club and the conservative press, they had considerable impact on the middle classes.’⁵⁴ Speaight refers to the ‘staunch conservatism’ of Woodruff,

who edited *The Tablet* from 1936. Woodruff deprecated what he called the 'anti-Fascist crusade', and propagated the notion that criticism of the Fascists was mere Communist propaganda. He said Franco stood for Catholicism and the family, and claimed that an 'authoritarian State' was necessary to cope with the 'chronic evil' of 'the dominance of Liberal economic doctrine', whose tool the parliamentary system was. In 1939 he says he wants to see Britain free 'from ideological hostility to authoritarian regimes', but fears the triumph of 'Liberals', who would be anti-Italian (and anti-Catholic); and advises that while such hostility thrives 'the Italians must cling firmly to their axis with Berlin'. A 'strong' State, he reassures his readers, does not mean tyranny, and there is no choice to be made by the Catholic between Fascism and democracy.⁵⁵ The *Tablet* and the *Catholic Herald* were amongst the few English journals to treat British Fascism sympathetically, the *Catholic Herald* declaring in 1938 that the British Union of Fascists' 'policy is the nearest approach to the social theory of the encyclicals that we have yet been offered by any prominent political party.'⁵⁶ (By then the 'liberal' De la Bedoyère was its editor; but Jerrold had joined the paper early in that year.) In the *Catholic Herald* editorial for 15 July 1938 it was urged that 'all Christians are in duty bound to sympathise with the cause of Nationalist Spain.' George Orwell—one observer who did believe in the 'Catholic pro-Fascist'—in an essay of 1942 on the Spanish Civil War, having cited the *Catholic Herald*, went on to refer to the 'huge pyramid of lies' constructed by the Catholic Press about the Republicans. The Distributist *Weekly Review* supported Franco, while in the later 1930s *The Month* ran Francoist articles: in 1929 a *Month* editorial had declared that 'No Catholic can be otherwise than grateful for the enormous services to faith and morality which the Fascist regime [of Italy] has rendered';⁵⁷ while in June 1938 *The Month* commended Germany and Italy for taking the menace of Communism so seriously, and in so doing fighting indirectly for democracy. The *Dublin Review* was more even-handed, running series of both anti-Fascist articles and anti-Communist and pro-Fascist ones. Bernard Wall confessed that he had been hesitantly pro-Franco, and had printed pro-Franco material in his periodical *Colosseum*, although he had also printed Jacques Maritain's 'denunciation of the idea, then prevalent in Roman Catholic circles in Europe and America, that Franco was waging a "holy war" against Communism.' Wall acknowledged his ideological closeness to Dawson at that time, and recorded that 'some people thought that Christopher and I were pro-Fascist', but asserts this was a 'confusion' due to the difficulty of defining Fascism.⁵⁸

Even the left-leaning publisher Frank Sheed, who was generally subject to Belloc's influence, did not take an anti-Fascist stand. Commenting that 'most of my Catholic friends saw Franco as leading a crusade', and noting how a group of Catholic Evidence Guild speakers—whose leader Sheed was—wanted to do pro-Franco propaganda from their platforms, in retrospect he remarked that he and his circle had known no more than that Franco was preferable to the opposition because 'he did not massacre priests and nuns'; although later he came to see that the issues were more complex than that.⁵⁹ Leftish though he was, Sheed published *Fascism and Providence* (1937), by one J.K. Heydon, who called for a new apostolate combining the Catholic Evidence Guild with Fascism, and insisted that Fascism 'is of Catholic origin and no English Catholic has a scintilla of right to condemn the Nazis. Catholics who do may be found to be fighting against God.'⁶⁰ With such literature, it is hardly surprising that in 1935 the British Union of Fascists could claim that 12% of their leading officials were Catholics.

All this leads to the slippery question of how much Catholics were aware of the evil within Fascism, of how upright their pro-Fascism was. One of Waugh's apologists has suggested that Catholic conservatives, such as Waugh, supported Mussolini because they saw him as a rival to Hitler, and believed that to oppose him would make him aggressive and drive him into Hitler's arms;⁶¹ but this is simplistic hindsight. Arnold Lunn remarked that 'Franco's alliance with Hitler was as embarrassing to British Catholics as the British alliance with Russia was to those American Catholics who were active supporters of intervention before Pearl Harbour.'⁶² It was an embarrassment because they liked to suppose that the differences between Nazism and Fascism were greater than the similarities, not wanting the Fascism of which they rather approved to be tainted by association with an anti-Catholic regime. It was a deep embarrassment that Hitler was long seen as an imitator of Mussolini, and generally known to support Franco, Franco enlisting Hitler's assistance in attacking a strongly Catholic part of Spain, and suppressing the papal encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* because it reprimanded Hitler. This sense of embarrassment forced a retreat on the Catholic pro-Fascist front from 1939 onwards, when war demanded expressions of animosity to the enemies of the nation. For example, with the onset of war Arnold Lunn became less wholehearted in his support for his beloved Nationalist Spain, observing that 'the Spain which saved Catholicism in the Iberian peninsula may yet fight as the ally of the Dictator who is determined to destroy Catholicism in Germany': he even acknowledged that Catholicism and Nationalism

were fundamentally at odds. 'The massacre of priests,' he wrote,

and the destruction of churches was the decisive factor which rallied to the support of General Franco ... thousands of Catholics who had no belief in dictatorships, whether of the Right or of the Left, and who would have readily endorsed the verdict of the great French historian, Alexis de Tocqueville, on the consequences of unlimited power. 'Unlimited power,' wrote de Tocqueville, 'appears to me to be in itself an evil, and a dangerous thing, and the mind of man unequal to the disinterested practice of omnipotence.'⁶³

The cause for concern lies in the zone of embarrassed ambivalence, where, for example, Chesterton and Dawson, perceiving that Fascism was radically flawed, did not pursue its denunciation.

It would be too historicist to defend them by saying they were 'creatures of their time': for theirs was a timeless religion with a non-relativist morality; and there were Catholics, such as Gill and Edward Watkin, sufficiently emancipated from their times to be clear that Fascism was wrong. In his book *The Catholic Centre*, which was completed by the middle of 1939, Watkin observes that 'many modern Catholics' have pragmatically compromised with earthly powers on the grounds that the values of the Kingdom of God are unattainable on earth, to the extent that they have even been prepared to do the warlike bidding of 'powers that care nothing for Christ'. He implicitly rejects the idea that the tools of what De la Bedoyère called the Dawnists, such as the League of Nations, are worthless because they are imperfect; and denies that Catholics were right to support Franco no matter what the means, just because he had a good end in view. He suggests that Catholics have allied with Fascist 'irrationalism'—which, as a revolt against reason, was philosophically anti-Catholic—because they have been frightened away from reason by the enmity of 'Rationalists', i.e. Liberals. 'Those,' he declares, 'who profess daily that in the beginning was Mind and Mind was God, must not compromise with the irrationalism of Fascism and militarism.' Implicitly he does not accept either the common Catholic stance that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'—with the result that Fascism's enmity to Communism makes it an ally—or the equally common Catholic divorce between Fascism and Nazism, because he sees all three politics as forms of irrationalism.⁶⁴

How, then, could it be that cultured and beneficent Catholics, normally so resistant to modernist heresies, gave even a measure of approval to Fascism? Pro-Fascism sprung from the observation that Liberalism and democracy were not only failing, but were corrupt vehicles for the selfish and unjust rich and powerful, and constituted a

social structure rooted in an anti-Christian, secular rationalism. Such radical disillusionment rendered seductive the vision of radical alternatives, the more so when one of them, Fascism, issued from Catholic societies: what came from Catholicism could not be all bad. The only other radical alternative, Communism, was known by Catholics to be even worse than the disease it sought to cure. Deep fears of Communism and chaos pressed Catholics into the arms of Fascism, which promised an anti-Communist campaign, social order, patriotic hatred of rootless Liberalism, and a comfortingly simple political vision to replace the agitating complex confusions of the day. The ruthless authoritarianism of Fascism did not alienate Catholics because they saw ruthlessness and authoritarianism of a more covert sort in their own society; and anyway it seemed to be accomplishing good things. Driven by frustration, and lured by the vision of social justice, they were influenced by—often Catholic—rightist propaganda, whose power was magnified—one hopes—by their substantial ignorance of Fascist perfidy. Not only did Fascism issue from Catholic societies, the Church appeared to extend the hand of friendship to it in a way that it never favoured Communism; and in its cultic and pseudo-religious aspects, in its corporatism, emphasis on the family and authoritarianism, it appeared to be sympathetic to the Catholic world-view, which had so few friends in either liberal England or an increasingly atomized, secular and chaotic civilization. They thought Fascism was democratic in spirit, and represented dynamism and honesty, culture and tradition, reformism and compassion for the ordinary man. Consequently, to the Catholic bred to trust his Church profoundly and unquestioningly, it seemed improbable that Fascism was wholly unworthy; the more so when the charismatic leading lights of the English Catholic literati, Belloc and Chesterton, refused to close the door to a sympathetic consideration of it. 'That it was the literati, the Catholic intelligentsia, as opposed to 'ordinary' Catholics, who were more susceptible to Fascism was probably due to their being hypnotized into accepting a simplistic model of both the disease and its cure by the anxiety resulting from their superior knowledge of the poison within and chaos afflicting society; while ordinary Catholics were less well versed in the intellectual discussions that Fascist propaganda exploited.

Unhistorical Reflections

While it is evident that a relatively large proportion of British Catholic writers of the 1920s and 1930s expressed a measure of empathy with Fascism, and can therefore be loosely described—if only for

convenience—as ‘pro-Fascist’, there are still the contentious issues of whether or not they can be called ‘Fascist’—even though the term is in a sense immaterial—and of what the whole phenomenon of Catholic pro-Fascism might mean. One can virtually absolve this group (with a couple of possible exceptions) of the epithet Fascist, for they were not temperamentally Fascist, in the popular sense; they and their apologists denied that they were ever Fascists: while, at one time or another, they criticized Fascism. Indeed they liked not so much what Fascism actually was and did, but rather the good they thought it was and did. Yet it would be inadequate to say: ‘They were not Fascist, they had good intentions, and there is no case to answer’: the devil hath power t’assume a pleasing shape, and a goodly measure of discernment may be expected of the children of light. Even the tone of their comments is remarkable, for there is no evident fear or abhorrence of Fascism, but an almost bland acceptance that it is one possible option. The politics of power, violence and idolatry holds no terrors for them: for them it is the politics of democracy, liberty and reform which is poisoned; and their minds are open to fighting extreme Leftism with extreme Rightism. So widespread was this mind-set that it is with relief that one comes across the few who did roundly deplore Fascism, such as Compton Mackenzie, who exclaimed at an anti-Fascist meeting that, ‘speaking as one who believes in the Catholic Faith’, ‘I detest this tendency to deify the state’; that ‘there are no words to condemn sufficiently this damnable false nationalism which is sweeping the world’.⁶⁵ But, judging by his lack of company, in the historical, as opposed to the theological, sense he was not ‘speaking as a Catholic’. In 1940 Ronald Knox urged: ‘we must try to understand the attitude of mind in which those [especially Catholics] who accept (without welcoming) a totalitarian Government strike the balance between their gains and their losses.’⁶⁶ If he is suggesting that we must collude with their compromise, this sits ill with a Catholicism which professes absolute values and inveighs against moral relativism.

One might suspect the moral acumen of good people admiring bad people, even for good reasons. We might ask why could they not distinguish between different types of corporatism: why could they not distinguish between nationalism and patriotism? Their powers of discrimination appear to have been corroded by the McCarthy-ish frenzy which afflicted the era. Is it not disappointing to find that they were blind to Mussolini’s ruthlessness and brutality, which were fairly evident by 1924; disappointing that they did not condemn his assault on Abyssinia, which resulted in hundreds of thousands of unnecessary deaths; disappointing that they did not see that Franco was fighting for the privileged, rather than for Catholicism, whose legitimation he

needed only to consolidate the power of the powerful; disappointing that they did not see that the man Jerrold dubbed a saint and Hinsley called the bringer of justice, charity and peace was the same who, from the beginning of the war, inflicted a campaign of the utmost ruthlessness and cruelty on his fellow countrymen, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, setting loose his Moorish mercenaries to loot, rape and massacre in a calculated terror campaign: the murder of 1000 prisoners (including 100 women) at Almedralejo in August 1936 alone makes the point? It is disappointing that their grasp of what was good in republicanism, parliamentarism and Christian Democracy was so slender, while, in a most un-Catholic manner, to different degrees they acquired faith in a novelty, a modern, secular panacea. Gill and Watkin, as members of the near-pacifist *Pax* group, were perhaps better equipped than Chesterton, Belloc, Waugh and Knox—who explicitly condoned mass violence in the pursuit of a ‘good cause’—to resist the glamour of Fascism, with its cult of power, force, oppression and violence. Here were generally tolerant people tolerating the intolerant and the intolerable, in an ambience which smacks of an un-Catholic air of rash politicking: even in genial Chesterton there was a hint of frustration, of slightly paranoid apocalypticism, leading to a weakening hold on his core political values of justice, democracy, liberty and equality: to throwing out the baby with the bathwater: ‘the Fascist was justified,’ he exclaims, ‘in smashing the politicians; for their contract with the people was secretly contradicted by their secret contracts with gangs and conspiracies.’⁶⁷ What happened to Chesterton’s and Belloc’s love of the ordinary man, their desire to see wealth and power devolved, their hatred of imperialism, elitism, nationalism, state-idolatry and the powerful? The whole phenomenon has the feel of a rift, a fault developing in moral tectonics, a loss of synchrony in values.

There is also a question of probity in all this. Some of these writers, while giving succour to Fascism, deprecated the very use of the word ‘Fascist’, as if, in *1984*-style, the marginalizing of a word would annihilate the negative ‘baggage’ it carried in the real world. Correlatively, they obscured the good within Leftism by dismissing it as ‘Communism’. Was Waugh adopting a pose in his discussion of Abyssinia: he was certainly a man to adopt poses; did Lunn see the inconsistency in deprecating ‘Fascist’ as a lazy, abusive usage, while freely speaking of ‘the Spanish Reds’; did Belloc see anything either wrong when he admitted to exaggerating the case for Mussolini for effect, or contradictory in holding the principle of standing up for the little man while favouring despotism: and what are we to make of Woodruff’s exhortation that ‘there are few more useful things for

Catholics ... to do at the present time than to stem the flood of propaganda which pretends that there is an international Fascist menace'?⁶⁸ De la Bedoyère alluded to the way Catholics were 'economical with the truth' over Abyssinia, so that the Church would not look too bad. Were they honest with themselves, as when they suggested Fascism was democratic? Dawson pointed out that there was great ignorance of Fascism in 'the average Englishman', in the direction of seeing only 'black shirts, castor oil and Jew baiting', and not its 'Corporative' economics.⁶⁹ That Catholic pro-Fascism avoided this unflattering general form of ignorance, and went for a more sympathetic ignorance, is suggestive: and that Catholics readily dismissed criticism of Fascism as Communist propaganda shows such poor judgment as to be suspect. It was as if they minimized what was wrong with Fascism in order to preserve a desperate myth of secular salvation.

In the maelstrom of controversy the Church's prophetic voice was muted. Not only was the Church's stance withdrawn and silent where its own interests—amid 'political' interests at that—were not directly threatened, it confusingly professed to have no interest in politics, while tolerating Fascism but condemning Socialism and Communism and criticizing liberal democratic society. Some of these writers spoke of the divorce between the City of God and the City of Man, and Watkin suggested how collaborators with earthly power emphasize the inevitability of the rift between the heavenly and earthly orders, the impossibility of bringing heaven to earth: with the result that earthly powers are left unchallenged. But even the pagans believed that Prometheus brought fire from heaven. The ambivalence of Dawson's book, referred to above, issues from deeply-laid Church attitudes: the City of God, he says, is opposed to the City of Man: but at the same time he emphasizes that Christianity is 'a spiritual society', thereby connoting its political passivity. This meant that the Church—especially given its own history of power and violence—lacked the energy and direction to confront Fascism. Dawson himself stipulated that Catholics should 'tolerate no division in their allegiance to Christ the King';⁷⁰ whereas this whole subject illustrates how Christians divide their allegiance between the Two Cities because they are unclear that allegiance to Christ pre-empts allegiance to Caesar: with the result that God's kingdom appears to be unduly circumscribed by Caesar's; and the Church pays double dues to Caesar by professing apoliticality while encouraging passivity before, and loyalty to, earthly powers.

William Blake wrote: 'The strongest poison ever known / Came from Caesar's laurel crown.' It would seem that the gospel of love should be more discerning about the glamour of power, lest the one is

hitched too readily to the other. Truly, Jesus said, 'render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's'; but what he gave was a denarius, and money, he tells us in another place, is a tainted thing.

- 35 For Speaight's comments see *The Property Basket Recollections of a Divided Life* (Collins & Harvill Press, 1970) pp.164, 372, 220-21; and for Jerrold see his essay in Douglas Woodruff (ed.) *For Hilaire Belloc* (Sheed & Ward, 1942).
- 36 Preston A *Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* p.160.
- 37 John C. Heenan *Cardinal Hinsley* (Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1944) pp.101-102.
- 38 De Ia Bedoyère *Christianity in the Market Place*, 1st. ed. 1943 (Catholic Book Club, 1945) p.79.
- 39 Evelyn Waugh *The Life of Ronald Knox* (Collins, 1962) p. 197. An anonymous reviewer (in fact John Willetts) of this biography recorded that Knox admired Franco and Mosley: *TLS* 9 Oct. 1959, p. 569.
- 40 *The Month* vol. CLXVIII No. 869, pp.437-45.
- 41 Jerrold *Georgian Adventure* (Collins, 1938) pp.323 ff., 374, 384, and ch. 12.
- 42 Jerrold op. cit. (Sheed & Ward, 1939) pp.152-5.
- 43 Lunn op. cit. (National Book Association [1937]) p.8.
- 44 *Tablet* 10 Apr. 1937, p. 506.
- 45 *Tablet* 15 July 1938, p.69.
- 46 *Tablet* 4 July 1936, p.7.
- 47 De Ia Bedoyère *Christian Crisis* ch. 9.
- 48 Hollis *The Seven Ages* (Heinemann, 1974) p.126.
- 49 *Tablet* 12 Oct. 1935, p.453.
- 50 Op. cit. (Methuen, 1984) pp.215, 248-50, 253.
- 51 Thomas M. Coffey *Lion by the Tail* (Hamish Hamilton, 1974) p.307.
- 52 *Tablet* 14 Nov. 1936, p.672.
- 53 Lunn *Memory to Memory* (Hollis & Carter, 1956) p.141.
- 54 Preston A *Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* p.101.
- 55 *Tablet* 1 May 1937, p.624, 7 Jan. 1939, p.4, 22 Jan. 1938, p.101.
- 56 Robert Skidelsky *Oswald Mosley* (Macmillan, 1975) p. 347.
- 57 *The Month* vol. CLIII No. 780 (June 1929) p.492.
- 58 Wall *Headlong into Change* (Harvill Press, 1969) pp.79-80, 89.
- 59 Sheed *The Church and I* (Sheed & Ward, 1974) p.200.
- 60 Cited in Hastings *The Shaping of Prophecy* pp.75-6, 79.
- 61 Donat Gallagher *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh* (Methuen, 1983) p.158.
- 62 Lunn *Memory to Memory* p.140.
- 63 Lunn *Come What May* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1940) pp.455, 456, 464.
- 64 Edward I. Watkin *The Catholic Centre*, 1st. ed. 1939 (Catholic Book Club, 1943) pp.90-2, 105-6, 111-113.
- 65 *Catholic Herald* 17 June 1938, p.7.
- 66 Knox *Nazi and Nazarene* p.6.
- 67 G.K.Chesterton *The Well and the Shallows* p.61.
- 68 *Tablet* 22 Jan. 1938, p.100.
- 69 Dawson *Religion and the Modern State* p.11.
- 70 lb. p.113.