

## From Joie de Vivre to Gaudium de Veritate: Counterpointing Two Satires and Saint Augustine's Confessions

(This article by Professor Robert Hickson has been posted on the *Apropos* website:  
[www.apropos.org.uk](http://www.apropos.org.uk) )

### --Epigraphs--

*“Tis pity learned virgins ever wed  
With persons of no sort of education,  
Or gentlemen, who, though well born and bred,  
Grow tired of scientific conversation:  
I don't choose to say much upon this head,  
I'm a plain man, and in a single station,  
**But—Oh! Ye lords of ladies intellectual,  
Inform us truly, have they not hen-peck'd you all?”***

(Lord George Byron (d.1824), “Don Juan,” (1818-1824),  
Canto I, Stanza 22—my emphasis added)

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*“Beata quippe vita est **gaudium de veritate**....gaudium de veritate omnes volunt....Cur autem veritas parit odium,...**cum ametur beata vita, quae non est nisi gaudium de veritate?** Nisi quia sic amatur veritas, ut,...hoc quod amant **velint esse veritatem**, et quia falli nolent, nolunt convinci, quod falsi sint?”* (For, to be sure, a blessed—a happy—life is in **taking joy over the truth....To take joy in the truth is all men's desire....Why now doth truth [therefore] bring forth hatred...since a happy life is loved, which is nothing else but a taking joy in the truth? Unless the reason be that truth is so loved [and in such a way]...that that which they do so love, they would also wish (or desire and want) to be the truth; and, also, because men would certainly not willingly be deceived [about a purported and cherished truth], they are unwilling to believe that they are deceived—i.e., so deceived about what is, in actuality, false?**) (Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, Book X, Chapter XXIII—my emphasis added)

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After recently reading a good contemporary satire by the ostensible (and irrepressible) “Father René Tiepolino,” entitled “Two Plus Two Makes Three: An After-Mass Debate in a Mixed-Use Sacristy,”<sup>1</sup> I immediately thought of Hilaire Belloc's own 1932 Cautionary Verse, entitled “The Example,” as well as Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (Book X, Chapter 23). Thus, I have thought to counterpoint and interrelate these brief texts, especially upon this anniversary of Hilaire Belloc's death.

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<sup>1</sup> This brief satire was posted on the Website of *Rorate Caeli* on 8 July 2014: <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2014/07/two-plus-two-makes-three-after-mass.html#more> i.e., posted “at 7/08/2014” and covering 4 pages as it is printed out now on solid paper, from which I shall henceforth quote and place in parentheses in the main body of the text above.

What was it in Father Tiepolino's Satirical Dialogue that first made me think of Hilaire Belloc and of his own effervescent irony and humor? It was, I blush to say, the mention and significant ecclesiastical implications of the word "parrot," and even its impish additional suggestion of "parrot fever," which is itself a clear and present, **zoonotic** danger. For, the Latin word for parrot is "*psittacus*," and the Latin word for the infectious "parrot fever" is "*psittacosis*." Let us, therefore, fittingly first consider how Hilaire Belloc himself has used the latter formidable word in his admonitory verse, called "The Example."<sup>2</sup>

With his special colloquial diction and more learned words combined, and his further flowing, syntactical combinations of audibly (and memorably) rhythmical words, Belloc begins his cautionary verse, as follows:

*John Henderson, an unbeliever,  
Had lately lost his Joie de Vivre  
From reading far too many books.  
He went about with gloomy looks;  
Despair inhabited his breast  
And made the man a perfect pest.  
Not so his sister, Mary Lunn,  
She had a whacking lot of fun!  
Though unbelieving as a beast  
She didn't worry in the least. (402)*

Immediately, as if to amplify Mary Lunn's presumption as well as her unmistakable exuberance, Belloc then gives to us some more specific details:

*But [she] drank as hard as she was able  
And sang and danced upon the table;  
And when she met her brother Jack  
She used to smack him on the back  
So smartly as to make him jump,  
And cry, "What-ho! **You've got the hump** [melancholy; moping moodiness]!"  
A phrase which, more than any other,  
Was gall and wormwood to her brother;  
For, having an agnostic mind,  
He was exceedingly refined. (403-404—my emphasis added)*

Then our Belloc deftly (and waggishly) shows us how those circumambient Christians disapprovingly looked upon this kind of performance:

*The Christians, **a declining band,**  
Would point with **monitory** hand  
To Henderson **his desperation,**  
To Mary Lunn **her dissipation,**  
And often **mutter**, "Mark my words!  
**Something will happen to those birds!**"  
Which came to pass: for Mary Lunn*

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2 Hilaire Belloc, *Cautionary Verses—Illustrated Album Edition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), pp. 402-407. "The Example" is, fittingly, the final verse in the book. The cited lines of this 42-line verse will be placed in the main text above, in parentheses.

*Died suddenly, at ninety-one,  
Of Psittacosis, not before  
Becoming an appalling bore. (405-406—my emphasis added)*

(We may recall this condign fate when we shall soon also meet the Auxiliary Bishop Annibale Psittacus, as depicted in Father Tiepolino's own Satirical Dialogue.)

But what of John “Jack” Henderson himself, and what of his fate?

Belloc adds the following words, thereby also reminding us of Lord Byron's comparable irony and satire in his extended narrative poem, “Don Juan”:

*While [John] Henderson, I'm glad to state,  
**Though naturally celibate,**  
Married an intellectual wife  
Who **made him** live **the Higher** life  
And **wouldn't** give him any **wine** [!];  
**Whereby** he fell in a decline,  
And, at the time of writing this,  
Is suffering from paralysis,  
**The which,** we hear with no surprise,  
Will shortly end with his demise.*

MORAL

*The moral is (it is indeed!)*

**You mustn't monkey with the Creed.** (406-407—my emphasis added)

By way of paraphrase and slight supplement, we might add another formulation, which intentionally resorts to an archaic word, but not to an archaic verity and revelation of reality:

**“The Moral is (it is forsooth!)**

**You mustn't monkey with the Truth.”**

But, what happens when the concept of Truth itself is more Hegelian than Thomistic? That is to say, when the Dialectical “Principle of Contradiction” is in the forefront, both intellectually and practically, thus, in principle as well as in application, and especially in the Church today? For, in Hegel, something IS SO, and is NOT SO at the same time, thereby undermining both Identity and Integrity.

It is, I believe, in response to this grave difficulty that “Father René Tiepolino (*nom de plume*)” writes—and yet with a pleasant satire—his announced “Work of Fiction.” For sure, Father Tiepolino offers us a charming and unmistakably courteous Dialogue between a Catholic Priest, “Don Pietro,” and an “Auxiliary Bishop Annibale Psittacus.” (Annibale, as in Archbishop Annibale Bugnini (d.1982), is the Italian form of the name “Hannibal,” as was the name of the Great Carthaginian Commander; and “Psittacus,” coming originally from the Greek, is the Latinized form, and means “Parrot,” as in the Latin poet Ovid's “*Psittacus Loquax*”—Garrulous Parrot.) He also later introduces “Cardinal Mandragara”<sup>3</sup> and “Cardinal Caper”—whose two names somehow drolly

3 This fictionalized name, “Mandragara” is very close to the esoteric (if not utopian) plant, “**Mandragora**,” one of the two purportedly “**soul-healing**” flowers, moly and mandragora,” (Father Hugo Rahner, S.J.), the latter, occultic and symbolic flower being also called “**Mandrake**” and formerly thought to have even magic (and indeed **aphrodisiac**) properties; and, moreover, a **narcotic** was prepared from its root. For a fuller discussion of this mystical “soul-healing flower,” see the learned study by Hugo Rahner, S.J., entitled *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (New York: BIBLO and TANNEN, 1971), especially Chapter V:2—“Mandragora: the Everlasting Root of Man,” pp. 223-277. The book is a translation of *Griechische Mythen in christlicher Deutung* (1957). N.B. “Deutung” is the German word for

suggest to me both “Cardinal Walter **Casper**” and “Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez **Maradiaga**,” two well-known Traditionalist Prelates, I think—although, admittedly, some thoroughly addlepatated critics still think them to be “Progressives” and even Modernists,” as well as “Liberation Theologians of Social Justice” and All That!

During the Dialogue, Father Tiepolino introduces us to some momentous themes, even to such copious and ebullient themes as the following: “the rejection of logic [i.e., of traditional, but not of dialectical logic]”; the Pope's **very** recent comments that “have **not yet** been spinned”; “a Joint Declaration between the Church and the United Nations”; “living that experience [of “the rejection of [traditional] logic”] for a long time”; “the **situation** of contradiction” as well as “**the Principle of Contradiction**”; “new doctrine [that] now **co-exists** with the traditional teaching” [of the Church]; how “the principle [of contradiction] is [according to the Bishop] **one** of the [1962-1965] Council's most precious gifts to us”; and “how... this [“precious”] gift has been **developed since** the Council”; our now “living in a post-logical era”—as exemplified “by the principle  $2+2=3$ ”—and how “logic has been superseded by a higher principle, which is Love” and by the utopian construction of “a Civilization of Love” and with the abiding presence of the “*subito sancto* patron saints of the new Church, the Church of Love”; and, finally, whether or not “love **depends on Truth**” or, rather, whether this celebrated new “love [is properly] **detached from** the Truth.” (pages 1-3, my emphasis added)

The **more** Traditionalist priest, “Don Pietro,” then again emphatically says to his interlocutor, the stalwart, and demonstratively sentimental Auxiliary Bishop:

*But love depends on truth: it must correspond to reality [as in “veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei”], otherwise it's no real love: a parent that gives a child 100 euros to buy drugs is not a loving parent. The love you're talking about is a love detached from the Truth, from the Truths of the Faith. At the end of the day, it's not love at all. (3)*

Bishop Psittacus immediately replies:

*“Hard words, Don Pietro, hard words!—which may not be good for your **image**. Careful, or you will be **telephoned** [by the pope himself].... **We have to adopt a Different theory of Truth. Reality changes and Truth changes with it** [even in the “Veritas Rerum”?]. Cardinal Mandragara [Maradiaga?] pointed out that we have to overcome outmoded **notions** like True and False. Cardinal Casper [Casper?] said that we **can't** be casuistic [or sophistic?] either: Rather we **must seek** what conforms to the pastoral necessities [and to the world?] of the day. (3—my emphasis added)*

To which Don Pietro responded: “Excuse me, but that is simply the Modernist doctrine condemned by St. Pius X in *Pascendi* [Dominici Gregis (1907)]!” (3)

In his expected, expressive character, Bishop Annibale Psittacus then petulantly articulates his prompt recrimination: “You and your condemnations! You're all the same you Traditionalists! You have no love! You have no heart!” (93-4)

The immediately following conclusion of the exemplary Dialogue is worthy of our exact and sequential reproduction, though the nuances of the entire dialogue should be closely read and savored:

**Don Pietro:** *I'll use my heart if you use your head. Tell me how Catholic doctrine [much less Dogma, irreformable doctrine] can change over time. Are you saying that before the Council*

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*Meaning, or Interpretation, but it is not the word for Mystery (as it is now presented in the English title).*

[Vaticanum II] the Old Covenant was revoked [and fulfilled!] and after the Council it was not revoked [or fulfilled]?

**Bishop Psittacus:** No, it was never revoked, so before the Council in 1962 it was revoked **and not revoked**, and after 1962 it was not revoked.

**Don Pietro:** So, if a non-Catholic who explicitly rejected the Catholic Faith but was otherwise good [sic] died before 1962 he would go to Hell, and if afterwards, he would go to Heaven.

**Bishop Psittacus:** Not quite. If he died before that date he would go to Heaven **and Hell**, and if he died afterwards he would go to Heaven. **You see how the World's a better place in the new [Revolutionary?] Pontificate!**

**Don Pietro:** Congratulations for your clarity [and self-revelation!]*—*there's not much of that [no candor!] in the hierarchy these days [amidst the practice of ambiguity and equivocation?!]

**Bishop Psittacus:** I'm a Logician after all! **It's enough to apply the [false?] principles to the facts.** No, Don Pietro, we must **overcome** these outmoded, scholastic categories of True and False **and go with the flow**, which in the pastoral field is **the flow of Love**. As I said before, we are living in a post-logical era. We have to **manage** [muddle through?] the best we can: if love is the way, let us love. *Vivamus atque vivemus.* [“Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus”—Catullus' *Passionate Love Poem: Carmina 5, c. 65 B.C.*—“Let us live, my Lesbia, and love”.] We can **spin it as Catholic** later.

**Don Pietro:** Thank you, Your Excellency, for these very precious, **disposable** words, which are **both true and false at the same time!** (4—my emphasis added)

Let us now consider how Saint Augustine might anticipate and handle this form of Hegelian “Dialectical Idealism” and the effective Denial of the Principle of Non-Contradiction and an insidious (and virulent) form of Self-Deception. We only now wish to consider Book X, Chapter XXII of his candid and eloquent *Confessions*, and to use Frank Sheed's excellent English translation of the Latin.<sup>4</sup>

Saint Augustine has a short, preparatory Chapter XXII, framing his ideas for the longer one to follow, which also deals with self-deception and false felicity:

*Far be it, O Lord, [“Absit, Domine,”] far be it from the heart of Thy servant [“absit a corde servi tui”] who makes this confession to Thee [in the rhetorical form of a Prayer to God!], far be it from me to think I am happy [“beatum”] for any or every joy that I may have [“gaudeam”]. [For, some joys are illusory and but short-lived.] For there is a joy which is not given to the ungodly [“impiis”] but only to those who love Thee for Thy own sake, whose joy is Thyself. And this is happiness, to be joyful in Thee and for Thee and because of Thee [“et ipsa est beata vita, gaudere de te, ad te, propter te”], this and no other [“ipsa est et non est altera”]. Those who think happiness is any other, pursue a joy that is apart from Thee [i.e., separated from Thee, the Truth], and is no true joy [“sectantur gaudium neque ipsum verum”]. Yet, their will [“voluntas”] is not wholly without some image [not substance] of joy. (233—my Latin inserted from the original)*

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4 Saint Augustine (d. 431 A.D.), *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (399 A.D.) (Translated by Frank J. Sheed) (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943). Of the thirteen books in the *Confessions*, Book X is especially illuminating for our purposes here, and especially Chapters XXII and XXIII of Book Ten, which are to be found in this edition on pages 233-234. We shall henceforth place the page references in parentheses in the main text above.

Here we may see that Augustine is attentive to true joy, not illusions; and he thus does not divorce joy from the truth. Nor does he ignore the will (“*voluntas*”) for the sake of mere feelings or desires.

In the following Chapter XXIII, he examines the natural, created propensity to seek joy, and then considers the dangers of self-deception, especially because of the burden and moral responsibility of dealing with the primacy of truth.

Augustine begins with a certain doubt, or seeming skepticism; and he then proposes other alternatives:

*Thus it is not certain that all men do desire to be happy [“*beati*”], since there are those who do not desire to rejoice in You, O God: and as this rejoicing is the only happiness [“*quae sola vita beata est*”], they do not really desire happiness [“*non utique vitam beatam volunt*”]. **Or it may be that all men do desire true happiness but** because the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, so that they cannot do what they would [Galatians 5:17], **they fall to what they can, and thus are content; because what they cannot do they do not want to do with sufficient intensity to make them able to do it.** I ask all men whether they would rather have their joy in the truth or in a falsehood [“*utrum malint de veritate quam de falsitate gaudere*”]: they reply as unhesitatingly that they would rather have their joy in the truth [“*de veritate se malle*”] as that they wish for happiness [“*beatos esse se velle*”]. Now **joy in truth is happiness** [“*beata quippe vita est gaudium de veritate*”]. (233—my bold emphasis added; italics in the original for the citation to Galatians 5:17, but italics added in all the Latin-language inserts)*

Especially with reference to true “joy in You, God,” Augustine goes on to develop his thought:

*This happiness all desire, this which alone all desire, for all desire to have joy in the truth [“*gaudium de veritate omnes volunt*”]. I have met many who wished to deceive, but not one who wished to be deceived. But where have they come to know happiness, save where they come to know the truth likewise [“*nisi ubi noverunt etiam veritatem*”]? For they [implicitly?] love truth, since they do not want to be deceived; and when they love happiness, which as we have seen is simply joy in truth [“*et cum amant beatam vitam, quod non est aliud quam de veritate gaudium*”], they must love truth also [at least implicitly?]: and they could not love it [truth] unless there were some knowledge of it in their memory [“*in memoria eorum*”]. (233—my bold emphasis added)*

Augustine then tries to understand the resistance to truth and to this source of true joy:

*That being so, why do they not rejoice in it [in truth]? Why are they not happy? Because they are much more concerned over things which are more powerful to make them unhappy [miserable, “*miseros*”] than truth is to make them happy, for they remember truth so slightly [“*quod tenuiter meminerunt*”]. There is but a dim light in men [“*adhuc enim modicum lumen est in hominibus*”]; let them walk, let them walk, lest darkness overtake them [“*ne tenebrae comprehendant*”]. (234—my bold emphasis added)*

Now, in his final section of Chapter XXIII, Augustine shows his magnanimity and generosity, as he also soberly (and profoundly) considers why truth is such a provocation sometimes, and especially with some kinds of men, or, rather, with many of them sometimes:

*Why does truth call forth [“give birth to”] hatred [“*Cur autem veritas parit odium?*”? Why is your servant [Augustine himself] treated as an enemy by those to whom he preaches the truth? **Simply because truth is loved in such a way that those who love some other thing want it to be the truth, and precisely because they do not wish to be deceived, [they] are unwilling to be convinced that they are deceived** [or self-deceived]. Thus they hate the truth for the sake of that other thing which they love **because** they take it for the truth. They love*

truth when it enlightens them, **they hate truth when it accuses them**. Because they do **not** wish to be deceived and **do wish** to deceive, they love truth when it reveals itself, **and hate it [the truth] when it reveals them**. Thus it [the truth] shall reward them as they deserve; **those who do not wish to be revealed by truth, truth will unmask against their will** [also in the Last Judgment (both Personal and General), the Final Verdict of Truth?], but it will not reveal itself to them. Thus, thus, even thus, does the human mind, blind and inert, vile and ill-behaved [caecus et languidus, **turpis atque indecens**"], desire to keep itself concealed, yet desire that nothing should be concealed from itself [even in its own finitude!]. But the contrary happens to it—**it cannot lie hidden from the truth, but only truth [can lie hidden] from it**. Even so, for all its worthlessness [misery], the human mind would **rather** find its joy in truth than in falsehood. **So that it shall be happy if, with no other thing to distract, it shall one day come to rejoice in that sole Truth by which all things are true.** (234—my emphasis added)

#### CODA

If we could imagine Auxiliary Bishop Annibale Psittacus himself now attentively reading Saint Augustine's discerning words from Book X of the *Confessions*—perhaps for the first time—we might also gratefully imagine that (and how) he would also soberly detect his own Narcotic Self-Deception and even his sentimental (contradiction-denying) *Psittacosis* (that all-too-infectious and zoonotic Parrot Fever of Superficiality). He might even thereby make a good and thorough Examination of Conscience and come to resist, by way of Reparation, any further spread of his febrile and irrational Enthusiasms, and also those of his fellow Successors of the Apostles, such as Cardinal Mandragara and Cardinal Caper, lest they further propagate the slowly poisoning and further diminishing fruits of the occultic “principle 2+2=3” which Father Tiepolino has tried to warn us of in his Satirical Dramatic Dialogue's own “Cautionary Tale” (which may even be deftly indebted to Hilaire Belloc and his own Cautionary Verses). The Moral is, it is indeed; you mustn't monkey with the Creed. As Saint Augustine himself might have added: “The Moral is, it is forsooth; you mustn't monkey with the Truth.” *Pace* Hegel and the Neo-Kantians and, thus, the “Transcendental Thomists” (Syncretic “Aquikantists” in the incisive phrase ebulliently and punningly used by Father Stanley Jaki one day in our conversation, some years ago, in the 1980s.)

Good Satire—with a clear Standard of Truth—as in Lord Byron, Hilaire Belloc, and “Father Tiepolino” helps give us the savor of reality along with the salt of the intelligence—and thereby helps us, as does Saint Augustine, to be “*Fortes in Fide*” amidst so much ecclesiastical sophistry and broken trust today. And let us live the Faith with truly loyal love, *sub gratia divina*, and continue the faithful Resistance against Error and Suffocating Deceit, “*ne tenebrae comprehendant*” (Saint Augustine)