

1958

Rebel With The Highest Cause

John Porter

St. John Fisher University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/angle>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Porter, John (1958) "Rebel With The Highest Cause," *The Angle*: Vol. 1958: Iss. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/angle/vol1958/iss1/5>

This document is posted at <https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/angle/vol1958/iss1/5> and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at . For more information, please contact fisherpub@sjf.edu.

Rebel With The Highest Cause

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Leon Bloy doesn't write—he cries out in personal agony. He doesn't set down principles, he wrenches his principles from an early breast-beating Christianity. There is no compromise. Virtue doesn't ride the middle course but sings and wheels its way helter-skelter in the channel of its own absolute rightness. Grays are foul and detestable. Vice is not to be avoided but destroyed. There is no such thing as passive resistance."

Cover Page Footnote

Appeared in the issue: Volume 3, 1958.

If we decide to live, it must be because we have decided that our personal existence has some positive value; if we decide to rebel, it must be because we have decided that a human society has some positive value.—HERBERT READ

REBEL WITH THE HIGHEST CAUSE

JOHN PORTER

Leon Bloy doesn't write—he cries out in personal agony. He doesn't set down principles, he wrenches his principles from an early breast-beating Christianity. There is no compromise. Virtue doesn't ride the middle course but sings and wheels its way helter-skelter in the channel of its own absolute rightness. Grays are foul and detestable. Vice is not to be avoided but destroyed. There is no such thing as passive resistance.

It is no wonder that Bloy has never dominated the minds of either Europe or America. His ideas are so uncompromising that he cannot have the appeal of "practicality" to our own compromising age. His are unpopular ideas about a very populous class, the class to which the majority of us belong. The middle class, to Bloy, is vice personified. The respectability of its members is the cloak of hypocrisy. He thunders out of the shadows of his own poverty, striking aside all the props which support his own rationalizing age. Christianity is not a religion, but a way of lie—a life and death struggle with everything that opposes it, and Bloy is prepared to challenge anyone who would dare to use it as a mask for his own personal advantage.

As Catholics, we need not exchange words concerning the rightness of the man. Certainly he is right; it is the assurance of his rightness that is bewildering. Was he guilty of a certain vindictiveness in his personal life that has spilled onto the pages of his own violent beliefs? There is much evidence that would support this. Still, it is difficult to read his novels without believing that he has the true conception of Christianity—the one that we have all pushed aside for many, many years, the concept that Christianity demands a real departure from the materialistic motivations of the world. It is said that Bloy was born in the wrong age, that he was the spokesman for the early centuries of the Christian era, when people were professing faith with knives at their throats and enemies ready to betray them at the least opportunity. The early Christians were simple; Bloy is their simplicity. Their own particular brand of unreasonable heroism is his trademark. He is the antithesis of modern-day Humanism.

The main difficulty with Bloy lies in a criticism of his standards. How can we raise any doubts about his absolutism when our own sensibility is so out of tune with his? It is easy enough to accuse him of eccentricity just as it is easy to accuse a Chinaman of eccentricity because of the slanting of his eyes. Dogmatic assertions are the easiest to attack in any medium, and Bloy, if nothing else, is painfully dogmatic. Therefore, given the proper tools, it is possible to cut almost every sentence of the man to pieces *if* we approach him from our own viewpoint.

His pattern of thought will never be neatly categorized by the scholars. This is not too surprising in view of the fact that the critics and scholars of his own time failed to understand and recognize his own peculiar virtue. Writing in the late nineteenth century from the poverty of lower class France, in the same social *milieu* that conditioned the naturalism of Zola, he embraced poverty and suffering as "the solution for every human life on earth." Poverty and suffering solidify all other virtues and color the lives of the majority of the earth's peoples. He particularly hated money-makers, the respectable, church-going money-makers who placed "Religion" on one scale and "Business" on the other. In regard to the latter he makes the following comment,

It would be impossible to say exactly what Business is. It is that mysterious divinity somewhat like the Isis of the swinish by whom all other divinities are supplanted. . . . Business is Business just as God is God, that is to say over and above everything.

This indictment is as dangerous today as it was in his time. The whole essay is absolute, dogmatic, and to some degree, uncomfortably true. Perhaps this is what makes his writing so disconcerting—a thousand arguments can be set up to shatter his contentions and methods, but a sense of doubt is planted, and any answer, regardless of its cleverness, seems specious. Scholarly work is lost on him. References and cross-references to the interpreters of his work seem to be pointless. He exists on his own for one motive—God. Humanity grovels and crawls toward God; Humanism is a word that could not enter his vocabulary.

Assuming that he was sane, the question of the motivations behind his writing seems to be answered by the writing itself. In *Art and the Pilgrim of the Holy Sepulchre* he strongly questions the validity of the "standard of the Beautiful." The same doubt is applied to the idiotic piety of contemporary Christian writers. His function as an artist lies in his ability to speak for the "Center of the Universe" and all that it implies. Art and the writer are nothing beyond this. Man does not exist unless he strives to restore this Center upon which the universe rests.

Leon Bloy, regardless of his headlong bigotry, has one quality that comes as a fresh, pleasant breeze to a rationalizing age. He has no doubt about Christianity. He will not question it and will attack anyone who does. He is neither scholarly nor practical, but he has a rare sincerity which could be born only out of a powerful love.

JAMES BOND:

UNUS MULTITUDINIS

The grasping giant sprawls
His frame throughout the very limit
And sends out his commanding calls
To the nescient blocks to fill it.
They come in swarms, like flies,
To some dulcetious essence,
And each in his own way struggles and tries
To wreck his neighbors' sweat-won fences.

What purpose, this insidious race?
Must we bend to this gargantuan bold?
While trying to keep his frightening pace
We serve but to strengthen his hold.

Full fretful of this monstrous mob
I determine not to succumb,
Suspicious of him who may from me rob
My person, I turn my ear numb.
Suspicious of him with the crimson-hot lyre
And him with the frock from the Brothers Brooks,
Ploughing and scraping through the stagnant mire
I look and find comfort in nature's own books.