

## Remembering Father Robert Bradley, S.J. ( 1924-2013) and His Distinctive Manner of Prudence

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

### A Triumvirate of Giants

In the 1980s during an evening meal at our home, after the eight children had gone to bed, Father Bradley festively and inimitably narrated with tears of mirth how three Jesuit priests of quite different character once found a house for rent and then attempted to live together in that home while they were all teaching at a Catholic university in Staten Island, St. John's University. The three priests were Father John A. Hardon, Father Vincent P. ("Pete") Miceli, and Father Robert I. Bradley himself.

Feeling apparently quite at ease, Father Bradley displayed some entirely unsuspected mimetic gifts and proceeded to act out how all three Jesuit priests together first entered, and with circumspection, the house they were considering to rent. Father Hardon immediately wanted to know where they were going to place the Blessed Sacrament; Father Bradley wanted to be sure that there was enough room on the provided book shelves for his military history volumes; and Father Miceli was especially concerned about the space and convenient conformation of the kitchen, so that he might regularly make for them his good pasta "*al dente*," which, according to his cherished traditions, required some tossing aloft of the potentially desirable pasta.

Even before the first part of Father's narrative was complete we three together, including my wife, were barely able to contain our laughter, much less our growing cascade of flowing tears of joy. We were even in danger of losing our seats, such was the escalating contagion of our mutual laughter and kindled, heightened imaginations. Those who knew Father Bradley knew his special way of nervous sensitivity and modest iterations; and who could ever forget the way Father Miceli spoke (with his Bronx or Brooklyn accent and idioms: "Hey, I just **taught** of it. Adam was the first wimp"; "Yeah, very good, very good!"); and then there were the more solemn and emphatic tones of Father Hardon ("We are touching here upon a mystery"; "Meekness is not weakness"; "We're only as courageous as we are convinced"; "What we have is Nature, what we need is Grace"; and, more forebodingly, "The days of America are numbered. Hear it! Hear it! The days of America are numbered.")

Father Bradley produced or exchanged all these idioms and tones with vivid artfulness, and with an unmistakably sympathetic appreciation of each other's distinctive mannerisms and eccentricities. His self-effacing self-irony was also delightful. And, thus, we listeners at the dinner table were soon saddened to hear that this "triumvirate of giants" did not last more than eight months together, there in their common dwelling. (Had they remained together even a little longer, and had there been a good observer and recorder to preserve their varied manners of life and learning, what a rich source of Catholic Comic Drama they could have further provided—and would have provided—also for the Upbuilding of the Faith! A providential example, almost a parable, of an irrepressible Jesuit Trio living together *ad maiorem Dei Gloriam*.) Concerning that Jesuit motto, Father Hardon always semantically accented the comparative adjective itself, **maio**rem. For, thereby, he said, we could not so easily become complacent, for we can always do **more**. To give more, to forgive more, to thank more, to love more. "Sanctity can thus be summed up in that one word, 'more,'" as he once told me.

Father Bradley had also perceptively noted that night at our supper table that Jesuits are, in any case, not so disposed to enjoy an extended common life together as other religious orders or institutes are, indeed, even as part of their own founding charism; and Saint Ignatius of Loyola understood this new accent of his militant Society of Jesus from the beginning. He would send a pair of Jesuits on a remote mission, often for mutual protection, but Jesuits were also formed to work individually on their own. (Father Miceli said to me sometimes, with a smile, that he had even taken a sort of “Vow of *Instabilitas*,” as distinct from the Benedictine “Vow of *Stabilitas Loci*”!)

### **Living in Community**

By way of contrast, Father Hardon himself, who had made a solemn private vow **always** to live in community with his fellow Jesuits, **or as often as was feasible**, also knew the trials of such community life—especially in the “progressive” Jesuit communities of the late twentieth century. Many times he emphasized that, for him as a Dogmatic Theologian and teacher, **the Crisis in the Jesuit Order began in America in 1957**, with the return from the General Congregation in Rome of the new Jesuit leadership, given their “interfaith” ecumenical ideas and their soon-to-be-inflicted novel implementations (for example, to have Jesuit-Curriculum accreditations and approvals made by **Protestant** Seminaries, and the like). Concerning Community Life under these new conditions for sure, Father Hardon often repeated to me the final words of Saint John Berchmans, S.J., words which were spoken on his deathbed. When young St. John was asked by his fellow Jesuits what his greatest penance was during his short life (1599-1621), he candidly said: “*Vita communis, mea maxima poenitentia.*” That is, “Life in common (with my fellow Jesuit brothers) was my greatest penance and mortification”! (Over the twenty years I was blessed to know him, Father Hardon, who died on 30 December 2000, must have repeated those trenchant words of Saint John Berchmans thirty times or so, but they were always spoken with his special smile which tacitly said, and omitted, so much more.)

### **Unable to live in community**

By way of contrast, Father Bradley told me in private in the late 1980s that he was not able to do what Father Hardon so heroically does, and has done for many years. No, he said, with sorrow in his voice: he could not do that, for it would also not be truly prudent, given his own acknowledged weaknesses and vulnerabilities. For, community life with his fellow Jesuits in those years, he humbly thought, would only likely destroy him and his nerves, if not also his faith—and he therefore very often tried to get permission, **while always remaining under obedience**, to have another Jesuit mission apart from community.

As a further help to our understanding of Father Bradley's painful hesitance, I know, specifically and with names, what Father Hardon himself sometimes had to endure at Georgetown University, and then, later, back in the Jesuit Community at the University of Detroit, too. **Being charitable with a public heretic** was a special trial for Father Hardon—especially with a material heretic who presents himself as an intellectual and a book-writing priest, much less one who was also somewhat struttingly prominent in secular politics! Such a combination was for Father Hardon, as he said to me more than once, one of his truly greatest trials, especially when one of these heretics also effusively sat across the table from him in the Jesuit Refectory, and even dared to wave his new book and then ostentatiously even to offer “as a gift to John,” a copy of his own latest and markedly disordered book!

### **Operational Categories!**

The counterpoint of Father Bradley and of Father Hardon in their own distinctive responses may also help our own understanding of these often purifying trials, as they were endured by two heroically

faithful Catholic priests. Father Hardon tried to differentiate and evaluate various classes of “creatures” and even to place them in certain rather firm categories, so that he might not himself have any “**inordinate attachment to creatures,**” in accord with Saint Ignatius' own directives in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Father Hardon even placed other persons—yes, even Jesuits—in one of four “operational” (if not “existential”) categories, namely, those who are either and always to be “**enjoyed;** or **endured;** or **removed** (entirely from one's life); or, rather, **sacrificed** (thus giving up a lesser good for a greater good).” As a complement to that taxonomy, he memorably defined love itself as follows: as “the willingness to suffer **with** the beloved, **for** the beloved, and—most painfully—**from** the beloved.” (He always said to me that each of those prepositions was very important—especially the last one, and this definition of his was the fruit of many years in the Confessional. “It just did not come out of nowhere,” he added. I can still hear him saying it.)

### **No, Bob. No.**

Concerning Father Bradley's special manner of prudence—and his special forms of suffering—he once said to me something I shall never forget, as we drove together in a car, only the two of us, returning from a weekend Ignatian Retreat he had conducted, “off season,” at the Bryce Mountain Resort in Virginia for the students and faculty of Christendom College. I most especially still remember how he said it, and I can still see the look in his eyes as he looked at me when he said it. (He was driving and I was seated beside him.) I had asked him whether, in good conscience, he could recommend a young man today (in the early-mid 1980s) to enter the Jesuit Order as a novice. Father Bradley turned to the right and looked at me painfully with his lowered eyes. Quietly he then said: “No, Bob. No.” That was all, and I said no more. I knew how painful it was for him to say that. Moreover, that he was so open and candid with me, in private, was something I have always cherished, as I later knew from him on some other occasions. But, he would never say such things publicly, lest he bring further scandal. (As the Chaplain of Catholics United for the Faith (CUF) for many years, he also resolutely believed that one should never publicly criticize a priest, and especially not a bishop or higher prelate of the Church, lest one initiate or exacerbate a scandal. At the home of Brent and Trish Bozell in Washington, D.C., in the early 1980s, we once thoroughly discussed this topic and his reasoning, and even exchanged with him, in part, some gracious disagreements.)

### **Breaking the tacit rules of discretion**

By contrast, Father Miceli published a book in 1981, entitled *The Antichrist* wherein he exposed not only the scandalous general conduct at Fordham University (where he earned his own Ph.D. in 1961, twenty years earlier), but also the conduct of leadership of specific Jesuit priests, naming them by name—which “earned” him his expulsion from the Jesuit Order, for he had apparently broken, as he was told, the Jesuit code's tacit rules of discretion. (Father Hardon was then prompt to help Father Miceli in his expulsion and exile, and to get him incardinated by the generous bishop in Ponce, Puerto Rico. Later, Father Miceli was reluctantly (for some), and but briefly, brought on to teach at Christendom College; but was encouraged to leave the College a year or so before he was to die on 2 June 1991. One night at the College, some time in 1987, as I recall, I asked him at his home on campus one evening, when he was writing an entire book, published in 1989, on violence: “Father Miceli, how would you summarize your argument. **What are the Roots of Violence?**” He memorably replied in his distinctive New York accent. “Bob, the roots of violence is **the hatred of the truth.**” Who could forget that? What a searchlight criterion.

### **Our Lady of Fatima and a loud hissing noise**

At that festive evening meal with Father Bradley at our home in the mid-1980s, he had so much Catholic learning to share with us—historical and theological learning—especially about the General Council of Constance (1414-1418) and the issue of “Conciliarism” (the claim to superiority over the Pope of a properly constituted collection of bishops in Council). He related the Council of Constance to other Councils which assembled on different grounds during that fifteenth century, all of them taking place within forty years: Pisa, Constance, Basel (a lingering one), and, finally, a transfer to Ferrara and then to Florence (1431-1435). He said, referring to other reliable scholars, such as Monsignor Philip Hughes, that “we do not yet know when or why Pope Eugene IV finally and formally brought the Council of Florence to an end. In the history of the papacy, this is perhaps the only time that a public act of such importance has not survived in any public record.” And we then spoke of the upsurge of this “Conciliarism”—also before, during, and after Vaticanum II—and we discussed the new ecclesiology implied by the post-Vatican II “National Bishops’ Conferences,” which, as the great and beloved John Joseph Cardinal Carberry of Saint Louis had told his friend Father Hardon personally (and also me), could all too easily become a kind of “**Para-Magisterium**” **inordinately influenced by their bureaucracy of administrators** (as he himself had further seen in 1974), thereby taking away or attenuating the personal responsibility of individual bishops. When Cardinal Carberry (d.1998) proposed to his fellow bishops, in 1983 (five years before his stroke in 1988) that their “Pastoral Letter on War and Peace” (especially about Nuclear Weapons) should be dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima, his fellow bishops made **a loud hissing sound** of disapproval (if not also of implied mockery), which brought a flow of tears to his eyes. (When he told me this story a few years later in Longport, New Jersey—near where his sister was living as a nursing Nun—he once again had tears in his eyes.)

### **The Blessed Virgin and an audible hiss**

When I told this story to Father Bradley at our home, he then told us his own story about a loud hiss. For, when he was himself present in Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome **just after** the formal closing of Vaticanum II on 8 December 1965 (the Feast of the Immaculate Conception), Pope Paul VI, in a weak voice, proposed to re-introduce an earlier and once-revered Title of Our Lady, also privately used by Pope Leo XIII, namely the title of Mary as the “*Mater Ecclesiae*”—the Mother of the Church. When this proposal was almost nervously uttered, as Father Bradley said, there was **an audible hiss** in Saint Peter’s and it shocked him and shook him deeply.

I then told him about Abbé Victor-Alain Berto’s far-sighted and piercing Letter back on 29 October 1963—almost a year before the separate treatment of the privileges and unique functions of Our Lady was altogether discarded (even as the “*Mater Ecclesiae*”)—and discarded **formally** at the Council, in 1964. Earlier in that late autumn of 1963, however, Abbé Berto had already presciently seen where such things were heading, concerning Ecumenism and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and thus he was to say, in part: “**The Council Fathers have asked Our Lady, the Blessed Mother, to leave the Marriage Feast of Cana. She left quietly, and they did not even give her time to say 'Vinum non habent.'**” (“**They have no wine.**”).”

These very words—especially the **unforgettable** first sentence—were almost exactly what I heard from our own West Point Catholic Chaplains, Monsignor Moore and Father McCormick, when we discussed the Vatican Council with them around Christmas of 1963, or, perhaps, it was in early 1964. Moreover, when we heard these poignant words—and henceforth kept this piercing image in our

hearts about “Mary's being asked to leave the Feast of Cana,” though, regrettably without our fuller grasp then of its momentous meaning—it was only six months before our own graduation as Second Lieutenants. And we were soon to go to the war in Vietnam and other places Southeast Asia only three months after our graduation, which was on 3 June 1964.

### **Military patrons**

(That 3 June 1964 was also the birthday of President Jefferson Davis of the Confederacy, who had himself graduated from West Point in the Class 1828, one year before General Robert E. Lee was likewise to graduate. And, more importantly for Catholics, our graduation day was also the Feast Day of Saint Clothilde, who was always getting her husband, Clovis, out of one jam after another!—as the traditional Catholic members of the French Military, notably the Élite Combat Helicopter Units, know very well, and not only those Catholics of the French Foreign Legion! For, Saint Clothilde is not only the Patron Saint of those Élite Helicopter Units, but they also competitively and impishly claim to be getting the famous French Foreign Legion **often** out of one jam after another!—although the Legion's Patron Saint is Saint Michael the Archangel himself! Father Bradley could especially appreciate such things, such Catholic military humor, also because one of his brothers was a West Point graduate.)

### **Abbé Berto's profound reflections**

The fuller context of what the French Abbé Berto (1900-1968) was so elegiacally prompted to comment upon (as a commissioned *Peritus Privatus* to a then well-known African-missionary bishop) presented itself, as follows. On 29 October 1963, at 3:00 P.M. after one of the important votes of the Council Fathers about Our Lady, Abbé Victor-Alain Berto was to write his comments (part of his diary, as it were), all of which would later be put and published in his Collection of Letters, which are themselves a vivid and candid witness of the time. However, some of his timely letters would be sent at once, or at least soon, back to France from Rome. His Letter of 29 October 1963 was one of them, for he considered what he had just observed to be of such moment and revealing decisiveness. At least by 30 November 1963 (the End of the Council's Second Session), Abbé Berto's letter of the previous month was more widely sent and made then available to many others.

A little more of the context will help us understand what Abbé Berto witnessed, a little over five years before he himself was to die, on 17 December 1968, depleted, exhausted and, some say, of a broken heart. The following question, he reports, was put to a vote on 29 October 1963: “Does it please the Council Fathers that the [separate] Schema on the Most Holy Virgin Mary, **Mother of the Church** [*Mère de l'Église*], be revised so as to become Chapter 6 of the Schema on the Church [*de Ecclesia*]?”

The vote resulted in 1114 votes in favor of merging the two schemas, and not preserving the separate and unique schema on Our Lady. Since the majority then required was only 1097 votes, it came to pass that the ecumenists, as it were, won by 17 votes. Thus it was that the schema on the Virgin Mary—to include the discussion of her role as Mediatrix of All Graces and even as Co-Redemptrix—was henceforth to be merged with that on the Church and the arguably attenuated or diffuse New Ecclesiology with its seemingly “concentric rings” and “penumbras” of membership, or association.

As a result, this is what, in part, Abbé Berto wrote from his heart on that very afternoon of 29 October 1963:

*The grievous [funestre] vote of 29 October 1963—apostasizing from [apostasiant] the Gospel of the Wedding Feast at Cana—far from inviting the Holy Virgin, had signified her to leave [son congé]. She hampered, she encumbered [encombrait!]! The Virgin Mary hampered [encumbered,*

*encombrai] the Council which invited her to leave. Oh, she was not asked twice. The earth did not tremble, lightning did not strike Saint Peter's. The Virgin Mary left discreetly in profound silence; it was so discreetly [done], in a silence so profound, that the words "Vinum non habent" ["They have no wine"] remained unsaid, and the fate of the Second Session had been sealed. (Fidélité catholique—Number 101, January 1985—my emphasis added)*

### **A reverent offering**

In our conversation about this matter with Father Bradley during his lengthy visit to our home in 1985-1986, I did not give the even fuller text as it was written and published most amply in Abbé Berto's Complete Letters. For, some of them I only discovered myself somewhat later, after Father Bradley was no longer teaching at Christendom College. (As it turned out, he stayed at Christendom only one semester, and declined to remain for a second semester as had been originally arranged. For, he believed that he could not himself teach in an adequate way so many students whose preparation for College seemed to him a little shaky, as well as did their attitude toward demanding historical and theological learning, and to the intellectual discipline it required.) While he was at Christendom College, he celebrated the most reverent Novus Ordo Masses I have ever known. Much more importantly, when Professor Alberto Boixados, Professor of Literature at the Argentine University of Cordoba, was visiting me from Argentina during the translation into English of his discerning book, *Arte y Subversion*, he consented **for the first time in his long life** to attend a Novus Ordo Mass (Father Bradley's Mass)—at my special request. Dear Alberto told me later—and also the modest Father Bradley himself when they soon gratefully met—that he had seldom (almost never) witnessed such a reverently offered *Actio Sacra Missae*—**Sacrifice and Sacrament**. Father Bradley was deeply moved—and he almost blushed (as I told him later!). What this reveals about this very special Jesuit Priest! (As I later came to know, when permission was granted him, Father Bradley gratefully often celebrated, in several places, and with great joy and deeply touching reverence, the Traditional Latin Mass—known also as the Gregorian-Tridentine Liturgy. We may well imagine how it was, and regret that, in those years, we could not ever be present.)

### **No cunning, no evasion**

But, it ought to be known, in any case, that Father Bradley was characteristically touched, moved, and pierced by Abbé Berto's words. We then considered together what might well have transpired in that "innovative" interval of "discontinuous development" **from late October 1963**—when I was still an all-too-callow cadet at West Point—**up to early December 1965** (the Feast of the Immaculate Conception). That is to say, from that designedly and purportedly Ecumenical initiative and *attenuating* movement concerning Mary, which began **from Our Lady's effectively being asked to leave the Marriage Feast of Cana, and ending up with the audible hissing inside of Saint Peter's on Our Lady's own Feast Day**. Yes, it even concluded with an inhospitable response to the Pope's hesitant proposal to have Our Lady's earlier Title newly restored as the "*Mater Ecclesiae*." But, Father Bradley was, as always, so respectful and reverent and discreet in his own truly prudent words of response to all of these troubling developments and apparently disjunctive ecumenical novelties, which seemed more attentive to Protestants in the West, than to the Orthodox in the East who were so deeply devoted to Mary (except when doctrines about her were proclaimed by a Pope of the later centuries!). But, there was to be found, in these searching discussions with Father Bradley, no cunning (*Astutia*), no cowardice, nor any evasion in him, for sure! ("Was the Rosary itself even mentioned in the Vatican II Documents, Father?") No deflecting sophistry from him! His manner of virtuous *Prudentia*

was always so admirable and so inspiring. (One of Father's brothers, one whom he especially cherished, had been a West Point graduate, as we have already mentioned, and Father Bradley thus always additionally admired the military virtues, also, especially as a loyal son of a converted soldier, Saint Ignatius.)

When Father Bradley later visited and studied in Rome at the Angelicum, during the interval of 1987-1988, roughly, he surprised us further by sending me (and my family) a special postcard from Vatican City. It was a picture of a lovely mosaic—one that was unexpectedly seen by Father Bradley himself in person—a mosaic which is to be found now inside the Vatican itself: a mosaic of Our Lady as the “*Mater Ecclesiae*.” In light of our earlier (and later) conversations, also about the Rosary and about the seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost, this surprise was an especially evocative and thoughtful gift.

### **The absence of the language of Grace**

While Father Bradley was actually studying at the Angelicum for his second doctorate—this one in Theology—and himself deeply involved with Catechetics, especially the Catechism of the Council of Trent and the Catechism of Saint Peter Canisius, S.J., he wrote some very illuminating and candid letters to us at the Old Farmhouse in Front Royal. And after he returned to Alexandria, Virginia and his cherished work with the Poor Clares on Popkins Lane, I happily saw him periodically, and sometimes also with the very learned Father William Most, who gave candid and sound answers to direct questions—both in the interior forum and, with permission, in the exterior forum—especially about the near absence (or intentional suppression) of the full Catholic doctrine and language of Grace in the then-current Ordinary (and Papal) Magisterium of the Church. Like Father Hardon and Father Miceli, these were sincere men of great integrity and of the Faith—and highly differentiated in their characters and modes of response and prudence.

### **Touching upon a mystery?**

Later, when the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* finally came out in 1994 in English—it was not to come out in Latin, in the authoritative *Editio Typica*, until 1997, some three years later—Father Bradley and Father Hardon and I were to meet at Saint Bernadette's in Alexandria, Virginia, where Father Hardon was receiving hospitality and residing for a short time. I shall never forget Father Bradley's face and words and tone of voice when he first arrived and I met him on the pavement outside the church. He said: “Bob, have you seen the New Catechism yet? It does not even mention Saint Pius X in the Index, much less say anything about Saint Pius' own Catechism. Pius IX is briefly mentioned. But more space is given to Theodore of Mopsuestia.” There was pain on his quiet, but expressive countenance—once again. (Bishop Theodore (350-428), originally from Antioch, was a contemporary of Saint Augustine of Hippo, and also the teacher of Nestorius, who, as the Church once authoritatively decided, himself heretically believed and taught, among other things, that Jesus was merely a **Human** Person, as distinct from being a Divine Person with an assumed, full Human Nature.)

When we met inside the Rectory with Father Hardon, he was much more reserved, and he remained silent, even mute. When I asked him **why** the New Catechism, especially (or at least) for pastoral reasons, did not first come out in the authoritative Latin Edition, from which the vernacular translations could then be carefully made, Father Hardon looked at me with a very hard look. A few weeks later, when he was with his small, close circle (which then included me) of Ignatian and Marian Catechists, I politely asked the question again in slightly different words, because Father Hardon had earlier so emphatically assured us that Pope John Paul II had told him **in person in Rome** that the New Catechism would **indeed** come out first in the Authoritative Latin-Language Official Edition, so

as to avoid many all-too-foreseeable forms of confusion and later, ambiguous or equivocal mistranslations. My question received even a harder look (dare I say colder?) from Father Hardon. He never answered my question. He did not even say: “We are touching here upon a mystery.”

By way of contrast, Father Bradley always spoke openly and respectfully and prudently in private; and he always acknowledged an undeniable difficulty, even when he could not give good explanatory reasons for what had happened, much less adequately understand the Divine Providence in the specific or more general situation. Both as to the acts of commission and even the seeming acts of omission. For him, too, as a faithful Jesuit priest, God's Permissive Will was often very mysterious indeed. But he always politely said—and lived it out—that we must not only generously **do** God's Known Will, but also generously **entrust** ourselves to His Unknown Will.

May beloved Father Robert Ignatius Bradley, who died (at 89 years of age) on 20 December 2013, now rest in peace; and be now, or soon, generously rewarded for his persevering fidelity in the Faith. A very loyal son of Saint Ignatius, with a very special character and distinct manner of living out the first cardinal virtue of prudence: the “*recta ratio agibilium*.” To watch him move gradually (and with a good sense of his audience and of the timing) “**from the knowledge of reality to the realization of the good**” (in the words of my own German mentor, Josef Pieper) was a very great example to many people, and certainly to this very grateful, but rather irascible, layman.

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