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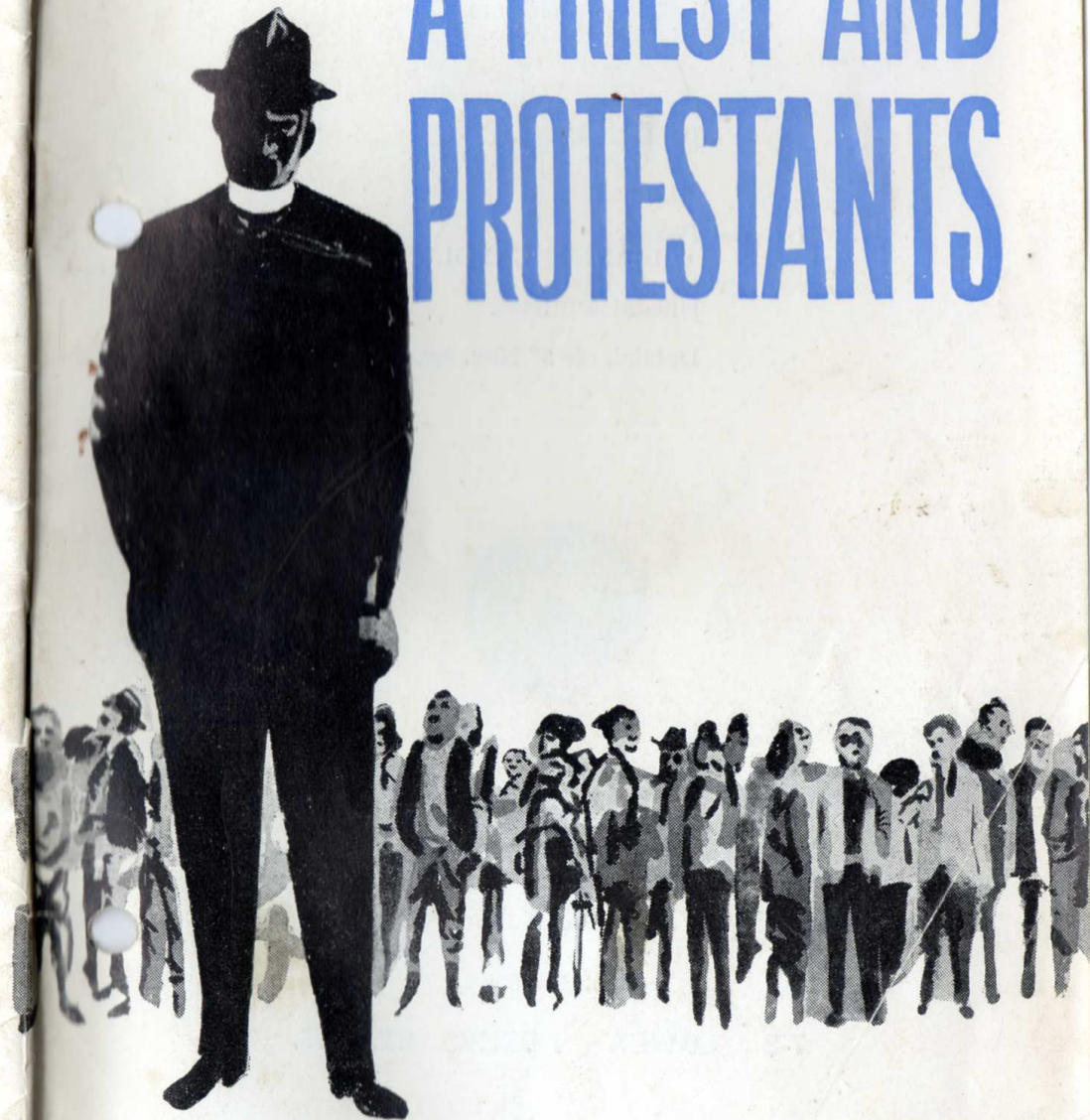
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A PRIEST AND
PROTESTANTS



REV. ROBERT NASH S.J.

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A Priest and Protestants

By

REV. ROBERT NASH. S.J.

The Legion of Mary organizes regular series of lectures for non-Catholics. The pages which follow form the substance of one such lecture given by the author to a group of about sixty Protestants in Dublin. It led to several pleasant, and, we may hope, not unprofitable contacts and discussions, and the suggestion has been made that the points raised might, with advantage, be collected and circulated in pamphlet or leaflet. The original lecture was entitled: "*Protestants and Catholics, —What We Think Of Each Other.*" It has seemed best to reproduce it in the manner in which it was spoken, elaborating perhaps, here and there, some of the ideas which had then of necessity to be curtailed through lack of time.

Two important events, relevant to the subject-matter of this booklet, have taken place during the months which have elapsed since the lecture was delivered. One of these is the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops; the other is the proclamation by Pope John XXIII of his intention to summon a General Council of the Catholic Church. The deliberations of the Lambeth Conference give many heartening indications of the Anglicans' sincere desire to explore once more the possibility of Reunion, and their willingness to discuss or even cede certain points. The Holy Father's decision to call a Council with the object of trying to heal the breach so long existing between the Western and Eastern Churches is evidence of the love and eagerness with which all "Roman" Catholics pray for that result.

ON TAPE

It would be a very real consolation and joy if these few pages were to contribute even a little to bringing about more mutual understanding and sympathy between Our Separated Brethren and Ourselves. It is disastrous and highly disedifying that discussions like these succeed only too often in producing more heat than light. Hence let us begin by repeating what was said in the spoken version, that it will be our principal care to be mindful throughout of the charity of Christ which embraces all souls of good will.

We would now ask you to imagine that you have, here on the table in front of you, a tape-recording machine. Please fit in the end of the tape carefully into the empty spool. Turn on the electric switch. That's right. Set the starter free. The two spools begin to circle around and presently the sound of a human voice fills the room. This is what you hear :

May I begin with a word of very sincere welcome, and may I say that it is a pleasure and a privilege to come and speak to you ? You will have seen on your invitation cards that the title of our proposed talk is : *Protestants and Catholics,—What We Think Of Each Other*. It is a comprehensive subject, and we cannot, obviously, expect to treat it exhaustively. We shall have to confine ourselves to just a few of the ideas which Protestants and Catholics incline to express whenever their conversation turns on those who differ from them in religion.

When I sat down to prepare this talk, there came back to my mind a remark once made by a Protestant girl. She had been asking me questions about Catholicism. One day, as I was trying to explain some point of doctrine, she interrupted. "Father, you must allow me say something. Thinking over what you have been telling me, I cannot but express my admiration. This much at least is clear to me,—yours is a beautiful faith."

A beautiful faith. It seems to me that we might take that phrase as embodying one of those things which some Protestants say about Catholicism. Never mind for the moment whether the Catholic Religion is true or not. Prescind in your mind from every other aspect of it except just this one,—its beauty. Perhaps you remember Newman's tribute, made to the Catholic Church while he was still outside its pale.

"Would that thy creed were sound, thou Church of Rome !
For thou hast power to soothe the heart, thou Church
of Rome !
With thy unwearied watch and varied round
Of service in thy Saviour's holy Home."

REAL PRESENCE

When I return to-night to Rathfarnham Castle where I live, I shall go into our chapel there and kneel to pray for a while. I am pretty sure to find other Jesuits there in prayer also. Now here is a group of men,—a mere handful of the more than four hundred million Catholics scattered across the world,—and they are absolutely convinced of this, that Jesus Christ is really, truly, and substantially present on that altar before them, under the Eucharistic Species. They are kneeling at His feet as truly as Mary His Blessed Mother knelt before Him in the crib at Bethlehem ; as truly as if they were on their knees by His side when He passed the whole night in prayer on the mountain ; as truly as if they were close to Him when He preached from Peter's boat to the crowds drawn up along the shore ; as truly as if they were on Calvary itself, on the ground soaked in His Precious Blood.

We are not asking you necessarily to believe this. All we want to stress is that *if* the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence were true, it would be extraordinarily comforting and beautiful.

It would infuse new life and meaning into the apostle's phrase : " Jesus Christ, yesterday, to-day and the same forever." *A beautiful faith!* A Protestant once said to a Catholic friend of mine : " If I believed what you Catholics believe about the Blessed Eucharist, I think I'd never be off my knees." Father Peter Gallway, a Jesuit who lived many years in London, was accustomed, even in his very old age, to remain long hours every night before the Blessed Sacrament. You would find him at midnight, and far into the small hours of morning, kneeling or seated there in the darkness, seemingly, like his divine Master, spending the whole night in the prayer of God. A younger priest once made bold to ask him how he occupied himself during all that time. What did he do or say or think? The old man smiled. " I suppose, Father, I may as well tell you very simply. I stay there quite quietly, and occasionally I say just one single word,—' God,' or, sometimes, ' Jesus.' " That was all. The overwhelming truth of that Presence filled and satisfied his hungry soul. The beauty of it. The solid consolation of it. The unfailing source of joy it is to the soul that realises. " Hold Him and deep Him for thy friend," counsels à Kempis, " who, when all others forsake thee, will not abandon thee nor suffer thee to perish in the end." Is it possible to doubt that the Catholic's conviction that in the Blessed Eucharist he can most literally obey this injunction, must inundate his soul with joy?

The beauty of it! But what most of all consolidates his happiness is the unfaltering assurance that is true.

It is no wonder that many Protestants are hankering for this doctrine which was filched from them by unscrupulous men in the sixteenth century. One sees signs of this nostalgia, for instance, in several Anglican Churches which set up an altar, and keep a lamp always burning, and genuflect, and celebrate " Mass." All this is evidence of their longing, their hunger,

for the Real Presence. They are painfully conscious of what the late Mgr. Knox described as "The Real Absence" in their Church. Their efforts to fill it are beyond all praise. Catholics are certain that these efforts can be successful when they seek the Real Presence where alone It can be found.

" Would that thy creed were sound, thou Church of Rome !
 For thou hast power to soothe the heart, thou Church of Rome !
 With thy unwearied watch and varied round
 Of service in thy Saviour's holy Home. "

MASS

Tomorrow morning, as a Catholic priest, I hope to stand at the altar and offer to God the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Once more, please focus your attention on a single viewpoint,—the extraordinary beauty of what we Catholics believe the Mass to be. We are certain that Mass and Calvary are identical. I am well aware that there are Protestants who state, as an objection to the Mass, that the Saviour's sacrifice is all-sufficient and that it is derogatory to that sacrifice to set up another, as though to supply for what Calvary lacks.

Such Protestants would probably be surprised to know that in speaking thus they are entirely in line with Catholic teaching. Catholics, too, maintain that Calvary is all-sufficient and that to try to set up another sacrifice would be a most gross insult to the Redeemer. But where they differ radically is in this,—that they do not for a moment admit that the Mass is a new sacrifice. It is the re-offering to God of the same sacrifice which was offered on Calvary, the only difference being in the manner in which that offering is made.

Don't you consider that such a belief is very beautiful? That, in the Mass, we can offer in atonement for our own sins

and the sins of the world, the infinite merits of Jesus Christ? That we stand thee in spirit by the Cross, like Mary on Calvary, and unite our poor petitions with that strong cry for mercy which sent its echo out over the hill on Good Friday?

Abraham pleaded for the two guilty cities, Sodom and Gormorrha. Would God not spare the cities if in them there were to be found even fifty, or forty, or twenty, or ten just men? If God listened to the pleading of His faithful servant Abraham, how much more readily will He bend down His ear when the prayer for mercy arises from the Heart of His own divine Son, Who continues to offer Himself in the Mass! The prophet Malachias foretold that God would reject, finally, the sacrifices of the Jews, and that in every place, from the rising of the sun till the going down of the same, a new "clean oblation" would be offered to God. The Mass, offered unceasingly day and night in the Catholic Church, is the fulfilment of this prophecy. If it is not, then where are the prophet's words verified?

CONFESSION

There are Protestants who do not like the Catholic practice of going to Confession. A man once said to me that he would consider it degrading to his manhood to kneel before a fellow-man, tell him his sins, and ask him for forgiveness. Certainly he would kneel before God and do all this, but never before another mere man like himself. We are told too, that this practice places a premium on sin. Catholics can commit as much sin as they wish, then run to the priest and be pardoned, and then start off merrily sinning all over again!

We would willingly deal with these objections, were it not that, as you know, we are restricting this part of our talk to considering the beauty, only, of the Catholic Faith.

Of this you may be certain,—that Catholics have stood up

after a good Confession and stumbled back into the Church intoxicated with a joy and peace in their souls so overpowering as to seem scarcely endurable. Is there not something amazingly beautiful in a doctrine which assures me that, no matter how vile my sins have been, no matter how often repeated, I have now been fully restored to the love of my Saviour? Who can exhaust the beauty of the sentence spoken by the merciful Christ: "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee?" Who can sound the depths of joy that flooded the soul of the erstwhile sinful Magdalene, when she listened and heard Him say that many sins were forgiven her, because she had loved much?

The Catholic catches the clear echo of wonderful words like these, as often as he comes, with a contrite and humble heart, to receive God's pardon in the Sacrament of Penance. And, once again, one detects signs of a craving in many upright Protestants that this treasure be restored to them. An army chaplain was visited by a non-Catholic soldier. "Father, I want to go to Confession. I know I cannot receive absolution. But my conscience is tortured by the thought of my sins and I want to unburthen myself, to tell you everything, with the assurance that whatever I say will never be divulged to another."

For that, too, is a wonderfully consoling fact about going to Confession. Whatever the priest hears, with reference to his penitent's conscience, in this Sacrament, is buried forever in his heart. He may never, under any conceivable circumstances, by word or sign, give even the smallest indication of this knowledge, not even to the person himself who has confessed. This law is established for the consolation and satisfaction of the penitent; he knows that even after he is dead the priest is still bound by this seal. Priests have faced torture and death rather than violate this sacred secrecy. St John Nepomcene, for example, was brutally murdered because he would not speak

in such a case. Even Martin Luther, renegade priest and monk, when asked about what he had heard in the Confessional, answered: "Anything else I shall willingly tell you; but not that."

There is much more one would wish to say about the beauty of the Catholic Faith. It would be a joy to talk about the Sacraments, what they are and what are their effects; about the doctrine of the Mystical Body which shows how divine grace links us together with each other and with Christ, He being the Head and we the members; about the historical argument for Catholicism,—namely, how she lives and grows despite the most violent hatred and persecutions all down the centuries. We have had time to call your attention to two or three of the truths we believe,—the Real Presence, the Mass, and Confession. We have only glanced at even these, holding them for you to view for a moment as one might hold a picture-card and indicate its salient points with a finger.

We feel confident that no fair-minded person, Catholic or not, can fail to appreciate their beauty. *If only* they were true! The Catholic believes they are. He has sound intellectual reasons for his belief. To believe merely because they are beautiful, merely because they appeal to him, would be the height of folly. But nobody is asked to believe until he has carefully considered the reasons why Catholics are certain that the faith they profess is not only beautiful but true.

DISLIKE

What else do Protestants say and think about Catholics? It is with great reluctance that we set down the next part of our reply. It is painful to have to admit it, but the proofs are beyond question that there are Protestants who cannot endure us Catholics, who frown on Catholicism, who even permit their disapproval to develop into violent and unreasoning hatred.

They are capable of descending to the depths of circulating lies about us,—please God, not deliberate lies in many cases,—but lies just the same which are calculated to make people believe that no name is evil enough for us and for the faith we hold and teach and love. I feel confident that no such Protestant is in this audience. I am sure that you all deplore such injustice as heartily as I do. I hope you will bear with me if I dwell for a short while on this exceedingly distasteful topic.

You may recall that some months ago a Presbyterian minister and I got a little into each other's hair. Both he and I, I am certain, are glad to be able to look back at this stage on the correspondence that passed between us, and recognise that it led to no breach of charity and friendliness on either side. While we were writing to each other, I received through the mail, mostly from anonymous senders, many tracts and pieces of literature explaining to me the villainy of Rome, her superstitions, her hypocrisy, her egregious errors. No one could even glance through these documents and remain in doubt about the motives underlying them. You turned away from these diatribes saddened and crushed to think that religion could masquerade in the garb of such misguided zeal.

This very day a friend of mine, a priest, told me about a letter he received recently from a non-Catholic. The writer explained that he had been attending a non-Catholic mission and he was growing sick and tired of it. There was nothing positive in any of the addresses given by the clergyman, only one violent attack after another on the "Church of Rome." Why, he wanted to know, don't some of you Roman Catholic priests come along to such missions and give us the chance of hearing the other side. Do you wonder any more why I say and think that there are Protestants who anathematize all Catholics and Catholicism? A young man, a Catholic, wrote some time ago to his father and mother. He holds a good job

in a large factory, and the overwhelming majority of his fellow-workers are non-Catholics. "We very often have discussions about religious questions, and you would be surprised how keen their interest is. Some of them don't like the Jews, or the Methodists, or the Church of Ireland,—but to a man all of them are absolutely one in condemning the R.C's."

In view of this evidence, and there is much more, it seems clear that we are compelled to admit that there are Protestants who abominate Catholics and all their works and all their pomps.

REACTIONS

What is the Catholic's reaction? When he reads some of the literature which I have described he experiences a sense almost of nausea. It is pathetic to discover not a single intellectual argument to support the writer's contentions, but only wild statements obviously dictated by unreasoning passion. Attacks like these will never convince any impartial reader. They are cheap. They serve only to degrade the people who launch them. No one whose opinion is worth anything thinks any the worse of Catholicism or any the better of Protestantism for having had them flung upon him.

If I were a decent-living Protestant, like many whom I know, I think I would be ashamed of my life to be even remotely associated with such mud-throwing. If I were a pagan who had read the New Testament my reaction would be: "Well, I don't know much about these Roman Catholics, but to me this at least is obvious,—the attacks under consideration, whether true or false, are quite definitely *not Christianity*. Christ preached love of even one's enemies, and every page of these documents is a denial of love."

A group of students clubbed together to study literature. They were not Christians, but as they went on with their work,

they found themselves developing an interest in Christianity. Their interest led them to three conclusions: (i) Christianity, as taught by Christ, must still be in the world somewhere. (ii) That form of Christianity was true which was most fiercely persecuted. (iii) The Catholic Church has been persecuted relentlessly from the beginning; at the moment it was being attacked more brutally and systematically than ever. Ergo. . .

Catholics are not unduly alarmed by persecution and dislike. What would really shock and frighten them would be the absence of that opposition foretold in so many places by Our Lord as the badge of His true followers. "You shall lament and mourn and the world will rejoice . . . in the world you shall have distress . . . wonder not if the world hate you. If you had been of the world, the world would love its own. But, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore does the world hate you."

ASKING WHY

It is intriguing and useful to try to investigate the reasons for this phenomenon. Why are there Protestants who dislike Catholics and Catholicism, who despise both, who sometimes even maintain an attitude of bitterness and cannot endure that a word be said on the Catholic side? Why? Three answers, among many others, occur to our minds and we propose to set them forth here for your consideration.

In the first place, then, it is certain that many Protestants dislike us and our religion because of *ignorance and prejudice*. They have never read an exposition of that faith by a Catholic; they have never in their lives spoken a word to a Catholic priest; if ever they broached the subject of religion to a Catholic layman, as likely as not they were left unsatisfied. (Admittedly and with sorrow it must be said that far, far, too many Catholics are *dumb* when questioned about their religion. Few of them

will introduce the subject on their own initiative).

Not only have the Protestants we have in mind never heard the Catholic Faith explained and defended, often whatever instruction they received was twisted and distorted and grievously maligned. Who can blame them if, as youths and adults, they instinctively condemn and look with hatred on the Catholic Church? Any priest experienced in instructing intending converts to the Church will tell you of the amazement of some neophyte on hearing for the first time the plain statement of what we actually believe. "But, Father, I was always taught that you say all Protestants go to hell! Do you mean to tell me, Father, that Catholics do not adore Mary and think she has more power than God? I have often heard that the Catholic Church is afraid of science. Now for the first time I discover that a long line of most eminent scientists were Catholics, and that, in this very day, the most brilliant scholars are dedicated heart and soul to the defence and service of your Church."

Remarks like these could be multiplied. They endorse our contention that much Protestant dislike is due to ignorance and prejudice. What they hate is, not genuine Catholicism but its grotesque counterfeit. Here are a few actual examples: Perhaps you have heard of Irie Newcombe. She was a remarkable woman. For a great part of her life she worked as a Protestant foreign missionary. At the age of seventy she became a Catholic and at seventy-four she entered the Carmelites, one of the most austere Orders in the Church. Irie describes her first encounter with a Catholic priest. She was a young girl, walking with her sister through a street in Florence, a priest stopped to ask the time. Irie was about to consult her watch, when the older girl seized her in panic by the arm. "Irie, Irie, don't talk to him! Come away at once! Don't you see what he is,—a Papish priest!"

"You need not go back seventy years for an instance," was the comment of a priest to whom I told this story. He went on to say that quite recently he was walking along a country road, searching for an address. A little boy of about five moved into view and the priest chatted with him in a friendly manner for a minute or two. As he was on the point of asking the youngster about the address, the little fellow suddenly exclaimed: "You are not a Roman Catholic priest, are you?" "Yes, to be sure I am. Why?" But the boy was already fleeing out of sight with the speed of an arrow!

Heaven knows what he had been told about Roman Catholic priests. We can only surmise. Whatever it was, it was going to prove to be the seed of distrust and possible hatred and prejudice. In all probability it would raise an obstacle preventing a dispassionate examination of the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Mother General of a certain Religious Order was making a visitation of the Houses in America. She had come from Rome. During the visitation there was question of building a new foundation, and Mother General went to inspect the site. It was the possession of a non-Catholic lady. After the nuns had left this lady confided to a friend: "My dear, don't you think I had better let them have the site? You see, the Pope sent his wife all the way from Rome to discuss the project, and it would be rather dreadful to disappoint them!"

Ignorance and prejudice,—it is fair to state that from this poisoned root springs much of the evil we are considering.

ARGUMENT

In saying all this we do not for a moment want to discredit argument. A Catholic's great consolation is that the more he investigates the intellectual reasons for his faith the more convinced he becomes of its divine truth. But mere argument

is not enough. I used to think at one time that the proofs of the Catholic Faith are so cogent that any fair-minded man to whom they were presented must forthwith become a Catholic. I do not think so any longer.

Argument will be largely unavailing if the approach to the study of the faith be not made in a spirit of docility and humility. The Kingdom of heaven can be received only by those who have the simplicity of little children. This simplicity is not credulity: you find a glorious example of it in an intellectual giant like Chesterton. As long as a person is out merely to win an argument, merely to pick flaws and defend his position with the assurance of arrogance, he will never have that frame of mind which will prove to be receptive of God's gift. For that is what the Catholic faith is,—a free gift of God. It is a divine gift, and no amount of mere reasoning will make a man accept it. God's holy Spirit must enlighten his mind and move his will. Ordinarily God will do this when once a man approaches the Church in an attitude of reverence and humility.

A non-Catholic boy, aged twenty, visited a priest. They talked about the Catholic faith. When he was leaving, the priest said: "Tom, what you should now do is to pray fervently and ask God, that *if* the Catholic Church is the only true Church of Christ, you may be able to recognise it as such." "Oh no, Father, that I would never do. You see, if I prayed like that I would be conditioning myself and might then not be able to form my own judgment!" It is not altogether clear what he meant. One remembers, at any rate, that Our Lord told us, when we pray, to go into the silence and hiddenness of our room and there pray in secret to the Father. That, I think we must agree, looks very like "conditioning ourselves" too.

Faith is a divine gift. It does not contradict reason but it transcends reason. We can believe the claims of the Catholic Church on the same authority and with the same assurance as if

we heard them from the very lips of Christ Himself. Catholics believe the teachings of the Church, not only because they seem just and reasonable, St. Ignatius writes that we should be prepared to believe that what seems to us to be black is, actually white, if the Church so decided. The Church will never ask us to believe that black is white. What St. Ignatius means is that we at once admit that the mistake was on our side in thinking the object was black, and, even though it may still *seem* to be black, we are convinced it is white on the authority of the Church.

But to submit one's intellect thus is impossible without the help of divine grace. That is why we have to pray for the gift of faith to "condition ourselves" if you like, to approach the study of Catholicism in a spirit of docility, prepared to examine everything we hear in a dispassionate frame of mind, and ready to accept what we clearly recognise to be true. This was the disposition of the boy Samuel when he prayed: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

For twenty years, Mr. Sidermann, a Jew, attended the lectures given each Sunday in Hyde Park, London, by the late Father Vincent McNabb. Father McNabb was an able exponent of the Catholic Faith. He and Mr. Sidermann were good friends. When he died his Jewish follower wrote a memoir in which he expressed his love and admiration for the Dominican.

Each Sunday they met at Hyde Park and crossed swords. And yet, after twenty years, Sidermann remained a Jew. He is a Jew to-day, and a Jew he seems likely to be till the end. Argument, however ably propounded, is not enough. It is necessary. It is an enormous help. But it can never be a substitute for the gift coming down from the Father of Lights confirming reason and enabling the recipient to believe *on God's own divine authority*, what he is taught in the Catholic Church.

We are commanded to "hear the Church." We are warned that whoever will not hear the Church must be classed with the

heathen and the publican. To His Church Our Lord has said : "He that heareth you, heareth Me ; he that despiseth you, despiseth Me ; he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me." From this it must be clear that the Church is authorised to teach in His Name and to demand the same obedience as is due to Himself.

BAD CATHOLICS

We have suggested ignorance and prejudice as partial explanations of the dislike and enmity which Catholics often incur. What Protestants often detest is not Catholicism at all, but the false and distorted version of it,—the only one they know.

Protestants say and think hard things about us, secondly, because they have had experience of meeting bad Catholics. They point to Catholics who are dishonest in business. They speak with scorn of Catholics who begin Sunday with Mass, and spend the remaining hours of the Lord's Day drinking till they are stupified. They complain of irreverent conduct in Catholic Churches. They are shocked to hear Catholics treat the Holy Name of Jesus with entire disregard for Its sacredness. In a word, they have discovered that Catholics, by and large, are a contemptible lot, and they conclude, with a note of sarcasm perhaps : " There is the Catholic Church for you ! "

Now the first fact to emphasise is that nobody deplors the inconsistencies here listed more bitterly than the earnest Catholic. Nobody will admit more readily than a Catholic priest that Catholics of evil lives are a blot and a stain on the Church's escutcheon. But do such lives form any reasonable argument against the Catholic Religion itself ? If Catholics are bad, if they live immoral lives, they do so, not because they are Catholics but *in spite of the fact* that they are Catholics. The Catholic Faith does not stand or fall by the lives of those who profess it. One has always, in fairness, to distinguish carefully between Catholics and Catholicism.

On the other hand, you have surely met Catholics whom you admired, and, I hope, loved. Perhaps you have read the lives of some of the Catholic saints, and no one can do this with an open mind, and fail to be filled with amazement and gratitude to God for having raised up such models to inspire us. They were dedicated men and women, they despised money and a good time, for they had close to the heart, interests immeasurably more worthwhile. The charity of Christ goaded them, as it goaded St. Paul, and, utterly forgetful of self, of their own needs or convenience, they devoted themselves, all they were and all they had, to one single task,—the spreading of the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ.

What do we deduce from their lives ?

Here you have people who are simply reducing to practice what they learn from the Catholic Church. Their lives are Catholicism in action. It is true we cannot argue from the bad Catholic to the detriment of Catholicism. But we can most fairly and reasonably conclude from lives shaped by the Catholic Faith that Catholicism is worthy of all praise. See how it works ! When Catholics live their faith, this is what happens.

INTOLERANT ?

Is the Catholic Church arrogant and intolerant ? There are non-Catholics who think so, and who advance this arrogance and intolerance as the third of the reasons why they dislike her heartily. Why must she always be out of line ? There is evidence on many sides of a strong desire for Reunion between all the Christian Churches. What is wrong with getting together and deciding on a few essential tenets to which all of us subscribe, and, outside of these, taking advantage of the liberty of the children of God to pick and choose ?

If anyone doubts of the eagerness of the Catholic Church for Reunion, let him seriously meditate on the following words.

They were written by the saintly Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical Letter on the Mystical Body. They are only one example from many which indicate the Catholic mentality towards those outside the fold of the Catholic Church. "From a heart overflowing with love," he writes, "We ask each and every one of them to be quick and ready to follow the interior movements of grace, and to look to withdrawing from that state in which they cannot be sure of their salvation. For even though unsuspectingly they are united to the Mystical Body of the Redeemer in desire and resolution, they still remain deprived of so many precious gifts and helps from heaven which one can enjoy only in the Catholic Church. May they then enter into Catholic Unity, and united with us in the organic oneness of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, may they hasten to the one Head in the society of glorious love. With persevering prayer to the Spirit of Love and Truth We wait for them with open arms to return, not to a stranger's house, but to their own, the house of their Father."

Perhaps you will say this is all very well, but why will the Catholic Church not meet us half-way? She expects us to capitulate entirely while she herself refuses all compromise. In point of fact, given the position she vindicates for herself, any other attitude is quite out of the question. She maintains that to her, and to her alone, the "deposit of faith" was entrusted by Jesus Christ. This "deposit" is the full content of the body of truth taught by the Founder of the Church. He commissioned His Church to guard it; He commands her to deliver it to men exactly as she has received it, adding nothing, subtracting nothing. He has left to her very definite teaching on all the dogmas she holds, on the Mass, the Real Presence, Confession, the Trinity, the Incarnation. She would not, and could not, dare tamper with these. They are divinely-guaranteed truths, admitting, therefore, of no sort of doubt or compromise.

She can, indeed, and she does, explore according to the needs of the times, into the content of the deposit. She sometimes, when she sees it to be opportune, solemnly defines a truth as an article of faith which was not such heretofore. An example of this in our own day is the Definition of Our Lady's Assumption. Before that Definition Catholics were free to accept or not to accept the Assumption; now they are no longer free. Why? Because the Church, after much prayer and most extensive and conscientious examination, declares that this Dogma was implicitly contained in the original deposit left to her by Jesus Christ. There is, therefore, nothing added; there is only a clarification, a development of doctrine.

MORALS TOO

The Church is equally definite and uncompromising in the fields of morals, and for the same reason. She claims that to her, and to her alone, Christ gave instructions concerning questions like divorce, marriage, and, implied in these, concerning birth-control. Hence, on all such matters she takes a firm stand. Alone of all Churches calling themselves Christian, she steadfastly refuses to give a divorce. She has never given a divorce, and never will. We state this with complete confidence. Cases may come to your mind where men declare she has granted a divorce. We have no fear in challenging such assertions, for we are certain that any such case, on being examined, will prove to be no divorce. Any other course is utterly impossible and a betrayal of Christianity. Our Lord has declared that it is God Who unites man and wife in holy matrimony. Those who accuse the Catholic Church of arrogance might consider what appalling arrogance it is for any so-called Christian Body to presume to dissolve what God has joined together, in face of the absolute divine prohibition.

Thus, in matters of faith and morals, the Catholic Church

finds herself in the position of being incapable of compromise. Our Lord did not leave her free to pick and choose. He gave her a very definite body of doctrine, and His mandate is to teach that, and nothing else, "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." He taught, not vague generalities, but a very clear-cut code of laws to be obeyed and a body of truths to be believed on His word. He did not tell His followers He was proposing His views for what they were worth; rather does He insist that they must be accepted under pain of eternal loss. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; he that believeth not, shall be condemned."

If the Catholic Church is founded by Him, if she is divinely commissioned to preach His gospel to every creature, she can no more compromise than He. Any other course is unthinkable. It is hard to see how anyone can fairly tax her with arrogance or intolerance. Truth is objective. She knows that to tone it down in order to suit the demands of "modern morality" would be no service to religion or to those outside her fold. To these last it would be a cruel kindness and to religion a mortal wound.

WHAT CATHOLICS THINK

It is time now to direct our attention to the second section of this lecture and to ask what do Catholics think and say about their non-Catholic brethren. The citation from Pope Pius XII, given above, supplies an insight into our first answer. Knowing and loving the Catholic Faith as we Catholics do, we cannot but feel a most poignant sorrow as often as we reflect on those who are deprived of its immense blessings. The sense of certainty we possess, the happiness and tranquility of mind, the identity of Catholic teaching in every part of the world, the complete assurance we have that the Church is a loving Mother and that to her we can yield ourselves and all we have,—who

can fail to see that we must ardently desire to share such treasures with the whole world?

All this we have received through no merits of our own. On every side of us we see men and women of noble, upright lives, who, apparently through no fault of theirs, are deprived of "so many precious gifts and helps from heaven which one can enjoy only in the Catholic Church." Many non-Catholics lead incomparably better Christian lives than many Catholics. This they succeed in doing in spite of many serious handicaps. What heights of holiness might they not attain to if once they found their way into the one Church founded by Jesus Christ?

"Would that thy creed were sound, thou Church of Rome!
For thou hast power to soothe the heart, thou Church of Rome!
With thy unwearied watch and varied round
Of service in thy Saviour's holy Home."

Along lines like these the Catholic begins to muse when he asks himself what he thinks about Protestants. His first answer is that he feels a deep sorrow. But nothing could be farther removed from the truth than that this sorrow puffs him up with sentiments of pride and superiority. Rather does he realise his greater responsibility for what has so mercifully been granted to him. Indeed he may even be mildly terrified as often as he remembers that "to whom much is given, of him much will be required."

CHRIST'S CHURCH?

What do Catholics think of Protestants? Once again we find ourselves face to face with an answer which is difficult and painful to state. Quite frankly, we Catholics find ourselves altogether incapable of understanding how Protestants can

sincerely believe themselves to be members of Christ's Church. How anyone can, on the one hand, study the Church founded by Christ and depicted in the Gospel, and then look from that picture to Protestantism and declare that the two are not only similar but identical, fairly baffles us to understand. To begin with, Protestants regularly refer to the Christian Churches. But Christ surely founded only one Church. Logic itself would therefore seem to show that only one of the claimants can be right; all the others must, of necessity, be in error.

Which is the right one? Catholics point to the Church described in the Gospel, and from that to their own, and to them it seems obvious that the two are identical. They do not for a moment call in question the sincerity of the adherents of other Churches, but what remains incomprehensible is the very fact that they can indeed be sincere.

A large notice was recently displayed outside a Protestant Church in Dublin. I stood and read it with amazement. Here it is, *verbatim rom*: "This Church is bound by no fixed creeds." That is a claim which, to the Catholic, is tantamount to saying: "This Church is quite definitely not the Church founded by Christ. He taught a body of fixed creeds; we do nothing of the kind!" And yet, if you told that non-Catholic clergyman he was not a Christian, he would be highly insulted and indignant.

A priest was taking over the care of a parish for a few weeks to let the local pastor have a holiday. On the evening he arrived the two were talking about the newcomer's duties, when a young Methodist minister was announced. "Father," said the parish priest, "this is a grand young fellow; come along and meet him." The interview developed into a three-hour session! Towards the end the visiting priest confessed that perhaps it was unfair to have two against one. "But did you notice," he asked, "that to all intents and purposes we were only one, since there was entire agreement between us on every point

raised?" The young minister admitted that that fact had not escaped him. "Now," pursued the priest, "please tell me this. Suppose you had any other Methodist, any other member of your flock, accompanying you during this visit, would there be the same unanimity between the two of you as between Father and me?" I leave you, dear friends, to supply the answer that was given.

Shortly before Christmas, a year ago, three Protestant clergymen met in New York. They wanted to discuss the question,—was Jesus Christ really God? Incidentally, does not the very fact that there is room for a discussion on such a subject and that it is tolerated for a moment, condemn as un-Christian the Church that tolerates it? But there was worse to come. These three learned divines, having weighed the evidence and sifted the arguments, declared in their wisdom that Jesus Christ was, indeed, the most perfect Man Who ever lived, but to maintain that He was God is fantastic, and cannot be admitted in this age of enlightenment!

Thence these men proceed to their pulpits and preach rank blasphemy. Can Christ's Church be comprehensive enough to accept this? What is the answer? I have put that vital question to many a Protestant and I have never succeeded in getting a satisfactory reply. Forgive me if I must say I feel that there is none possible to give.

At this stage I do not think it should be necessary to assure you that we speak in no harsh or censorious spirit. We are mystified, and puzzled, and made sorrowful,—that is all,—by an enigma that seems to us insoluble.

THE MOTHER OF GOD

Our whole talk this evening might have turned on our respective attitudes towards Mary, the Mother of the God-Man. Many Protestants are convinced that we Catholics have gone

astray in our devotion to Mary. They believe that we give her the place in our homage which is due only to God. They consider that we exaggerate recklessly her prerogatives and privileges and imagine her to have a power of intercession which puts her divine Son Himself in a position of dependence on her wishes and commands.

Let us suppose for the moment that all these charges are true. Let us admit, for the sake of argument, that Catholic devotion to Mary is, in point of fact, all awry. If we dishonour God by extravagant honour shown to His Mother, it would be reasonable to expect some clear indication of the divine disapproval. Has God given any such indication? Quite the contrary, there is incontrovertible proof that the love and reverence shown to Mary meets with God's full blessing. From many such proofs we propose to select one only,—the story of Lourdes.

A hundred years ago this back-water little town came into the news. Our Lady appeared there several times, showing herself to a very poor, small, uneducated child named Bernadette. She spoke to this girl, commissioning her to see that a great Church would be built on the spot and promising that it would be a source of immense blessings to the world. Bernadette's apparently impossible task is now a *fait accompli*. Lourdes is known the world over and millions have gathered from the ends of the earth to visit the shrine and manifest their trust in Mary's intercession and the childlike love they have for her as a Mother.

Miracles have been multiplied at Lourdes. What is a miracle, first of all? It is a suspension of the ordinary laws of nature. If I hold this watch in mid-air and presently take away my hand, and if the watch remains there still suspended without any support, you have a miracle. The watch, according to the law of gravity, should fall to the ground at once. If it does not so fall you have a suspension of that law for which there is no natural explanation.

Miracles happen at Lourdes. Cures are brought about which cannot be explained or accounted for by natural causes. Sometimes it is the manner in which the cure is effected that is miraculous; sometimes it is the cure of the disease itself; sometimes both. But we can assert unhesitatingly that there are miracles. Why?

Well, at Lourdes there is a panel of doctors who examine and scrutinize every alleged cure. This panel is composed of men and women of any religion or of no religion at all. A few years ago the resident doctor told me that at that particular time he had on the panel a Communist, a Jew, some Protestants and some Catholics. Hence there is no question of packing the jury. Any duly qualified doctor can sit on this panel if he wishes.

In the hundred years since Our Lady first appeared at Lourdes well over two thousand miracles have been passed by such a panel. Now please note that they are in no way partial to the miraculous or to the claims made by those who were cured. Indeed some of them are hostile and would be very glad indeed if they could ridicule and discredit all such claims. Still, because they are honourable and conscientious men and women, they declare that, in more than two thousand cases submitted, there is no natural explanation possible.

The Church is more cautious and much more reserved in admitting miraculous intervention. She too has investigated each case. She has declared that in close on one hundred instances there is evidence which cannot be gainsaid, that the cure or the manner in which it was done is inexplicable apart from miracle.

CHARLES MACDONALD

Mr. Charles MacDonald, a Dublin man, went to Lourdes a few years ago in a dying condition. He travelled all the way on a stretcher and made the journey with great difficulty. He was

suppurating in one shoulder; both lungs and both kidneys were in an advanced stage of tuberculosis. One night, in the hospital at Lourdes, the doctor said to the nurse: "Nurse, do not leave poor Charlie; he cannot possibly live till morning." The doctor was proved wrong. Charlie survived till next day. More, he actually asked to be taken down to the baths and immersed in the cold water!

If you are acquainted with the story of Lourdes you will remember how, under Bernadette's hand, a spring of water gushed forth. That spring in the interval has given thousands and thousands of gallons of water, and it supplies the baths where pilgrims at Lourdes regularly bathe.

Imagine poor Charlie MacDonald, in the appalling condition we have described, being borne on his stretcher and telling his attendant to plunge him into the icy water! You will be inclined to exclaim that this is insane and cruel. But Charlie did that as an act of trust in the power of Mary's intercession. He did it as an act of penance, heroic penance, and to express the love he had for her. What happened? Ask himself if you meet him. "In five seconds," he tells you, "I was a new man. I walked out of the water a complete cure, in perfect health and I have never looked back." You can see him any time you like. He is as sound and strong a man as you could wish to meet. Gratitude to Our Lady fills his heart, and also, he will explain a sense of something like embarrassment that she should have let her choice fall on him for this miraculous cure.

Now once more suppose that Catholic devotion to Mary is gone astray. Suppose it is derogatory to the homage due to God alone. Suppose we are showing to Mary a sort of idolatry. Suppose all the charges made by non-Catholics against this devotion are true. You have then this astounding state of affairs which might itself bid fair to border on the miraculous. You have Almighty God solemnly showing divine approval, in

unmistakable manner, of our attitude to Mary. He endorses our love and trust and veneration by a series of miracles which cannot be gainsaid. He blesses abundantly what, in our supposition, is blasphemy and idolatry!

Lourdes is an argument not only for the supernatural, but a mark of approval of the filial love and zeal for Mary which have always flourished in the hearts of Catholics. What do Catholics say and think about Protestants? They think that Protestants are unjustified in considering that Catholic devotion to Mary is wrong. Not only is it not wrong. Lourdes and its series of proved miracles shows unmistakably that the love and veneration we give to Mary are most pleasing to her divine Son. Mary is God's handiwork, "our tainted nature's solitary boast", to quote the Protestant poet. Any greatness she possesses has been given her by God. "He Who is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is His Name." In praising Mary and confiding in her power and protection all we are doing is showing honour to one whom God Himself has raised to a position unique in the divine economy.

MIRACLES OF SOUL

There are miracles at Lourdes. Over two thousand have been passed by the panel of doctors. But these are miracles, as we might say, merely in the physical order. Who can reckon the miracles wrought in the spiritual order? The sinners converted, the cynics and scoffers returning striking their breasts, the atheists led to belief in God and in His Church? There can be no panel of doctors to investigate the miracles of the soul. They are witnessed, for the most part, only by God's angels. What glimpses of them we do get, are yet another sign of divine approval of Catholic devotion to Our Blessed Lady. Lourdes and veneration for Mary as practised in the Catholic Church do not detract from our love and adoration of God

This, indeed, must be recognised as understatement.

The Rev. Dr. Whitman, Methodist minister, wrote as follows, about a year and a half ago, in the *Methodist Record*: "We Protestants have never given to Mary the place she is given in the New Testament, though we profess to be New Testament Christians. She is there called the most blessed of all women and is given a supreme place among the daughters of Eve. She did feed the lips that spoke, as never man spoke, with her own milk. She did shadow, with her divinely-maiden self, the Light of Life when It was frailer than smoking flax . . ." We are happy to note this recognition, and we would stress again that all Mary's greatness is precisely on account of her divine Son. Of herself, Our Lady is a mere creature, no greater than any of ourselves. The marvellous graces given to her are due to the fact that God chose her to be His Mother, and enriched her with the gifts and privileges proper to one destined for such unprecedented exaltation above angels and all mankind.

Even more arresting are the words of a German Lutheran magazine called "Sancta." "If things are really what the Catholic Church states them to be," it writes, "we must realise that the Message of Fatima is not for the Catholic Church alone, but is meant for the whole of Christianity, for the whole world. This is the question. Either it is the Holy Spirit Who is working through Mary, and these appearances are great miracles and incomprehensible graces which God has given to men, in our own very days, and therefore all Christians, even non-Catholics, ought to open wide their hearts and wills to such great appeals. Or it is a gigantic hoax, and every non-Catholic Christian ought to protest loudly against it.

"In either case these matters cannot be ignored by us. We ought to do this impartially, carefully, and without delay, because ruin threatens our frontiers. It might even happen that

through not understanding them and grasping them, we might be rejecting the saving Hand of God We ask all other Christian denominations to join us in making an objective examination of these facts, which are of such extraordinary importance.

"If these facts are not to be denied, then we ought to infer from them all their consequences."

This is, indeed, a most welcome indication of the rational approach to Catholic devotion to Mary, which may well lead our separated brethren to the full knowledge of the truth deposited by Christ in His Church. We make no attempt to deny that this is our ardent desire. If you have listened to our tape-recording so far, you will surely believe at this stage that this desire is not the outcome of any wish merely to add to the membership of the Catholic Church. It is no part of our purpose to point in a boastful spirit to the numbers of converts. Rather is it true that our apostolate derives from a love of the Catholic Church because of the knowledge we have of what she is and what she claims to be. We know her experimentally. We know her from the clear statements she makes in describing herself. She is no mere collection of individuals. She is no official travel bureau which is set up for the issuing of tickets for heaven. She is, says St. Paul, the Body of Christ and we are members of that Body. We cannot but wish and pray that everyone else, too, was one with us in that Body.

SUMMARY

Perhaps it might be useful, before turning off this machine, to set out under a few headings, the thoughts which have been occupying our minds. Our title was: *Protestants and Catholics, —What We Think of Each Other*. There are Protestants, we gratefully acknowledge, who think that ours is "a beautiful faith." It is, and we illustrated its beauty by considering what

we Catholics believe about the Real Presence, the Mass, and the Sacrament of Penance. There are Protestants, alas, who dislike us and our religion, who sometimes go to the lengths of vilifying both. We undertook to prove that this lamentable statement is true, and we went on to ask why. It is due, we said, first to ignorance or prejudice or both. Very often what they object to, is not Catholicism but the distorted version of Catholicism which is the only version they have ever heard. They dislike us because they have encountered Catholics whose lives, to say the least, were a very poor advertisement for their glorious faith. They dislike us, finally, because they regard us as intolerant and arrogant, obstinately refusing to co-operate with other Christian bodies in their work for Reunion.

When Catholics look at Protestants they experience, in the first place, a feeling of poignant sorrow that they should be deprived of the immense blessings enjoyed in the Catholic Church. Secondly, they cannot understand how Protestants can be satisfied that a Church with many contradictions, on fundamental doctrines, can be hailed as the true Church of Christ. Lastly, they are at a loss to know why some Protestants take exception to the doctrine of the Catholic devotion to Mary, the Mother of God.

Nothing now remains, dear friends, except to thank you for coming to hear what we had to say, and for the courtesy and attention with which you listened. We propose, some time, to publish this Talk in booklet form. If we express the hope that it may come into your hands and that you may pass copies along to others, you will not misunderstand or misinterpret our motive.

APPENDIX

Since this booklet was written, the author has come across "Journey to Lourdes" by Alexis Carrel, A noted doctor and at one time a sceptic and unbeliever. He tells his story in the third person, calling himself "Lerrac." It is the account of a miracle which might be said to have forced him to his knees.

There is space only for a brief quotation or two. "This unfortunate girl (Marie Ferrand) is in the last stages of tubercular peritonitis . . . She has had tubercular sores, lesions of the lungs, she may die at any moment under my nose . . . If such a case as hers were cured it would indeed be a miracle. I would never doubt again. I would become a monk!"

. . . She was lying on her back, inert. Her head, with its white emaciated face, was flung back on the pillow. Her wasted arms lay flat at her sides. Her breathing was rapid . . . Her pulse was excessively rapid, a hundred and fifty beats a minute, and irregular. Her heart was giving out . . .

"(Lerrac) made his way towards the Grotto . . . He glanced again at Marie Ferrand. Suddenly he stared. It seemed to him that there had been a change . . . If the change in Marie Ferrand was hallucination it was the first one he had ever had . . . He stiffened to resist a tremour of emotion . . . he concentrated all his powers . . . Her eyes, so dim before, were now wide open with ecstasy as she turned them towards the Grotto . . . Suddenly Lerrac felt himself turning pale. The blanket which covered her distended abdomen was gradually flattening out . . . He watched the intake of her breath and the pulsing of her throat with fascination . . .

"Marie Ferrand, in a white jacket, was sitting up in bed. Though her face was still grey and emaciated, it was alight with life . . . 'Doctor,' she said, 'I am completely cured. I feel very weak, but I think I could even walk.'"

"'What will you do?' Lerrac asked, 'now that you are cured?'" 'I shall join the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul and nurse the sick,' she answered. To hide his emotion, Lerrac left the room.'

(Extract from "Journey to Lourdes" by Alexis Carrel quoted by kind permission of the publishers, Hamish Hamilton Ltd., London).

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