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# Why I Am a Catholic

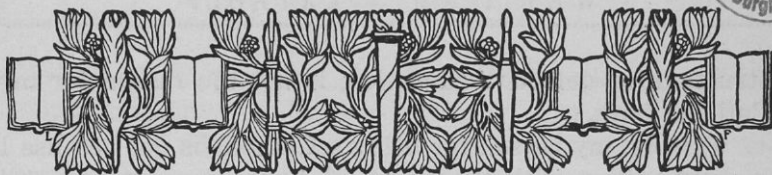
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## Why I Am a Catholic

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**T**O indicate in a few words why I am a Catholic, I must begin by stating clearly several negative reasons for my faith.

First of all, my reason for being a Catholic is not simply because I was born of Catholic parents. That merely removes the question one step backward. My parents were Catholics for the same reason that I am one, and the arguments that I propose using in this short article to support my Catholic faith are precisely the ones my parents used to support their Catholic faith. Hence the mere accident of birth is not the cause of my Catholicity.

Secondly, my reason for being a Catholic, is not because I have blind faith in the Catholic Church, whose doctrines I do not clearly understand. Just the reverse of this is true. My faith is not blind at all; faith is a light, and my faith is illuminated, and I hold tenaciously to the Catholic faith, not because I do not see, or because I see darkly and in an obscure manner, but simply because I see the truths that God has revealed so clearly that not a shadow of doubt crosses the horizon of my faith. Hence ignorance, or lack of in-

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struction, or defective education, is not the reason for my Catholic faith.

Thirdly, my reason for being a Catholic is not because I am unfamiliar with the Bible. I have been reading and studying Holy Scripture from my early youth. The Bible held the place of honor in my own home, and I have memorized many passages in it, and I am able to quote chapter and verse for every fundamental doctrine of my Catholic faith. Hence my knowledge of the Bible strengthens my Catholic faith.

Fourthly, my reason for being a Catholic is not due to my lack of knowledge regarding the teachings of other denominations claiming to be the Church of Christ. I am familiar with the basic principles of every Christian and non-Christian denomination. I have weighed and balanced their respective doctrines, and not one of the sects teaches in its fulness the same doctrines that were taught by Christ and the Apostles. Hence my being a Catholic is not due to a deliberate unwillingness to seek everywhere for the teachings of Christ, but rather it is because I have investigated so exhaustively that I am a Catholic.

With this preamble, I now pass on to state briefly some of the many reasons that urge me to be a Catholic. First of all, I know from study and investigation that in the Catholic Church and in it alone can I find in its entirety every single doctrine that Christ taught. Hence the Catholic Church is the only institution on earth that can make any sensible claim, supported by documentary and tangible evidence, to be called a Christian Church. By being a

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Christian, I mean one who believes the truths that Christ taught, and practices them as perfectly as he can.

I am a Catholic because my reason tells me that all the truths necessary to be believed today must likewise have been necessary to be believed by the earliest Christians of which the world has record. In other words, there can never be any change in the things which we must believe in order to attain heaven. Souls had to be saved in the time of Christ, and souls have to be saved today, and there can be no change in the requirements then and now. But I find that the Catholic Church alone is unchanging and unchangeable, ever one and the same.

I am a Catholic because the Catholic Church is the only Church that is in fact spread all over the known world, and it is the only one that has a right thus to be scattered everywhere, because to it alone was addressed the solemn command of Christ: "Go, teach all nations." No other denomination was given this awful charge.

I am a Catholic because only in the Catholic Church is there to be found that striking unity for which Our Blessed Lord prayed, and which has ever been one of the most prominent characteristics of His Church. The Catholic Church has preserved her undivided unity at all hazards, even at the price of immense numerical losses. And just as Christ Himself allowed some of His disciples to depart from Him, rather than sacrifice His doctrine, so also now, when heresies arise, the Church never compromises or denies her Lord, nor does she jeopardize the divine deposit of sacred truth entrusted to her administration.

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I am a Catholic because Christ made it necessary for me to believe all He taught, but in order to believe what Christ taught, it is necessary for me to know exactly, and without the possibility of error, just what Christ did actually teach. Of myself, alone, and unaided, I am unable to do this. Hence the necessity of some authoritative representative of Christ, who, aided from on high, is competent to tell us without error, just what those truths are that were once delivered by Christ to His Apostles. Hence to believe at all, I must know infallibly what to believe, and the only Church that makes any claim at all to be infallible is the Catholic Church.

I am a Catholic because only in the Catholic Church is there any due recognition of the authority of St. Peter as the Prince of the Apostles, the Bishop of Rome, and the first Pope, and consequently of the authority of St. Peter's successors as the Bishops of Rome, and the Vicars of Christ. Where Peter is, there is the Church, and without the Pope there can be no genuine Christianity. Hence I am Catholic because only in the Catholic Church can we find that the Pope assumes his rightful and traditional place as the head of the Church, and the infallible teacher of all the faithful.

I am a Catholic because the Catholic Church is the only Church built upon the foundation of the Apostles, and whose Bishops and priests today derive all their powers in an uninterrupted succession from the Apostles down to this present day, without any gap or intermission, and during all that time, just as today, it has taught every single doctrine taught by the Apostles.

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Moreover, I am a Catholic because the Catholic Church is the only Church in which there is a striking resemblance to Christ, by reason of the fact that it is constantly persecuted. Christ was a Man of sorrows, and His Church likewise must ever be afflicted. The bark of Peter is always storm tossed, and no form of religion can compare in this respect with the Catholic Church. Hence persecution is practically the fifth mark of the Catholic Church.

I am a Catholic because the Catholic Church has been the origin and the source and the conserver of the civilization of the present day. Even during those ages, which it was once the custom to call dark, when the human intellect lay slumbering, it was the Catholic Church that kept the lantern of science ever burning. If we go through the long annals of the world's history, century after century, we will see that, when not crushed by tyrants, or throttled by penal laws, it was the Catholic Church that founded libraries, opened museums, endowed universities and schools, provided them with teachers, promoted scientific discoveries, fostered intellectual culture, and encouraged the manifold productions of human genius. I am a Catholic because the greatest architect, the greatest sculptor, the greatest painter, that this aged world has yet witnessed, were all three Catholics. I refer to Bramante, Michelangelo and Raphael.

The world's greatest poet, Dante, was a Catholic; the most commanding intellectual genius the world has ever seen, St. Thomas Aquinas, was a Catholic; the world's greatest discoverer, the man who guessed the greatest secret on record, Columbus, was a Catholic.

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I am a Catholic because I am an American. I am a native of the soil. And Americans, more than others, have abundant reasons for being Catholics. Columbus himself was a Catholic; it was his staunch and unwavering allegiance to his Catholic faith that made it possible for him to be introduced to his royal Catholic patrons, who enabled him to set out on his unparalleled voyage of discovery; the primary scope and object of the great navigator in turning his caravals westward was to propagate the Catholic faith; nay, more than all this, it was Catholic money, furnished by the Catholic Church, that purchased and fitted out his three sailing vessels.

But above and beyond all this, there is still another fundamental reason why I am a Catholic, and why all Americans should be Catholics. It is because the very perpetuity of this great country depends upon its profession of the Catholic faith. It does not take one to be a very deep student of the philosophy of history to realize that Catholicity alone spells progress and stability. If this country is to continue its greatness and to maintain the proud and noble position it has already achieved, such a happy result can be brought about only by profession of the Catholic faith, and by the practice of Catholic principles. There is no progress, no stability, no great movement onward, no real development anywhere outside the influence of the Catholic Church, and whatever onward march appears to be elsewhere is but the reflection borrowed from Catholic sources, and through the instrumentality of Catholic agencies.

Is it not a simple matter of fact that at this moment the

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progress of the human race is entirely identified with the spread and influence of the nations in which a great proportion of the population embraces and professes Catholicity? What Buddhist or Mahometan or Pagan nation is believed by others, or believes itself, to be able to affect for good the future destinies of the human race?

The idea of the progress of states, no less than of individuals, is a creation of the Catholic Church and in direct proportion to the strength and fervor and intensity with which the nations of the earth have embraced Catholicity is their belief that they can influence the future, and indulge the hope of a world-wide and enduring empire. How few of us ever stop to consider this great and solemn fact of history? The germ of our national greatness and the guarantee of our future prosperity, spiritual and temporal, is bound up with the profession of the Catholic faith. I am a Catholic, therefore, because no one can be deep in history without embracing Catholicity. In the pages of history we recognize the Catholic Church as the nurse and guardian of our mental and moral life, and the copious fountain of intellectual and moral illumination that is poured out in floods upon those even who love her least, and who scarcely notice her. The tangible effect of Catholicity upon the face of human society is so obvious that like the sun itself we heed it not until our languid sense is aroused by some observant astronomer or artist. The sense of human brotherhood was unknown in pagan times; society knew not how to be human and kindly disposed until the day that Christ was born, and Catholicity began to penetrate into the hearts of men.

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The sacredness of human rights is a creation of Catholicity, radiating from the very heart of the Church into the society of the outer world.

I am a Catholic because it was the Catholic Church that first softened slavery and then finally abolished it; it was the Catholic Church that set the seal of dignity upon poverty, and she has championed the cause of the poor in every place that her doctrines have been welcomed and practiced. The hospital is an invention of Catholic charity. It was only when the Catholic nations began to feel the sense of human brotherhood that international law began to have any existence at all, and it rules over a large portion of the civilized world today, making it possible for justice to have at least a hearing, and giving ample scope for the exercise of compassion, mercy and generosity, instead of the high-handed barbarous savagery that marked the wars of heathen times.

I am a Catholic because Catholicity has changed many of the external aspects of human existence. It has created a new religious language; it has given us a new form of worship, and has furnished us a new calendar of time; it has opened up new and sublime ideals to art, and it has invested the forms of social intercourse among men with new graces of refinement and mutual consideration.

Who then can calculate the immense and ever accumulating debt of gratitude that the nations of the earth owe to Catholicity. When the Catholic Church is strong, great nations rest upon its strength; and when Catholicity is weak, nations speedily totter, for without its sheltering pro-

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tection they are unable long to stand alone. If we look over the history of the world, ever since the time that nations have had a written history, and begin to trace the records of those tribes and dynasties and countries that have never come within the pale of Catholic doctrine, we can discover in them no steady law of progress. There is about them no continual development, no general movement onwards, no fixed rule to explain their occasional brilliant outbursts, and their unexpected decline. Instead of a gradual, unceasing evolution, and a tendency upward and onward, there is a perpetual wavering, a continued fluctuation, and a never ceasing oscillation and vicissitude.

On the other hand, if we look at the nations that once were converted to Catholicity, and who for long centuries lived under Catholic influences, and whose populations openly and fervently professed their Catholic faith, we see them making a steady and unremitting progress. When such nations were most Catholic, they were most successful. It was then that they led the way in every great achievement that was attempted in their times. But if we look at such nations and study their subsequent history after they rejected Catholicity, we soon realize that whatever progress they made after that time has mainly been the result of the Catholic influences still left in the country, before the fund of Catholic ideas had been entirely exhausted. It was the overflow, so to speak. There have been, alas! nations that have fallen away from their Catholic faith, but the moment they did so, they tolled their own death knell. Decay set in at once, even though imperceptibly, and sooner or later, and

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soon at the latest, their power began to wither and at length they perished from the goodly company of the great family of nations. Once northern Africa was entirely Catholic, and northern Africa could defy imperial Rome. Once a great portion of Asia was Catholic, and many of the intellectual luminaries of antiquity came out of the Orient. The once flourishing Catholic portions of Africa and Asia are today arid deserts, physically, intellectually and morally, because they rejected the Catholic faith.

But let us take a more modern instance, which is happening under our very eyes. This will be a concrete case of what I have all along been insisting upon, namely, that the Catholic faith is necessary for the integrity and the perpetuity and the progress of nations.

In their revolt against Catholicity, the nations that rejected it have their most conspicuous example in modern France. When France was most Catholic, she was the first nation in Europe. The splendors of the reign of the sainted Louis, for instance, have never been surpassed, even when they have been equalled by his successors. France in her most Catholic days and for long centuries, led the march in every noble enterprise that could engage the mind of man. But as the accumulated waters of Catholicity have flowed away from her, there has been a steady ebb of her glory. Her arms no longer dominate Europe, her literary and intellectual eminence has been lost, her very language has been superseded, and her vital statistics show that in the laboratory of the world's history she is a labelled specimen of moral decadence.

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This is a very large subject, and I can only suggest the merest outline of the vast fields of thought that it opens out to us. The amplest leisure of a lifetime, and powers incomparably great, would be insufficient to do justice to it, or to indicate how our individual and national greatness is intimately bound up with the profession of the Catholic faith, for Catholicity alone is the backbone of nations.

I am a Catholic because the Catholic Church is the only Christian institution in existence that can trace its history in a direct line from the present day back to the dim distance of the earliest antiquity even to the very hour of Christ and the Apostles. The Catholic Church is absolutely the only living link that binds us to the vanished past. What are the reigning houses and the royal families of Europe compared with the unbroken continuity of the Catholic Church? The Hohenstaufen, the Hapsburg, the Bourbon, the Colonna, the Stuart, dashed over the world like a meteor, blazed, dazzled, and then dropped almost completely extinct. Amid the universal disintegration of all human institutions, and the passing of the pageant of earthly royalty, there is but one society in the world's history that holds its place, constant, firm, rigid and inflexible, and that institution is the Catholic Church, ever ancient and ever new, venerable with the traditions of twenty centuries, and fresh with the vigor and the buoyancy and the enthusiasm of perennial youth, teaching all men in all ages, and in all lands the unadulterated truths of Christianity, and maintaining in undiminished splendor her own identity amid the strifes of warring kingdoms and the crash of tottering empires.



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