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An
Investigation
of the
Catholic
Religion



By the
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INTRODUCTION

As I am a stranger to you, dear friend, who read these lines, and am one whom you shall probably never know personally, perhaps it may be permissible for me to mention that if I were a narrow-minded zealot without sympathy or love for those who differ from me in their religious views, I would scarcely be honored with the repeated invitations which have come to me to speak in the various Protestant churches in the community in which I live, on the practices and belief of the Catholic Church. Neither would I have received a gold Knights of Columbus emblem in 1925 from the Acacia, a fraternity composed exclusively of Masonic students at the University of Illinois, as a token of appreciation of the influence which they esteem I have exerted in the interests of friendship and good will between Catholics and non-Catholics in the

community in which I minister. I mention these facts in an objective manner with no thought of personal glory and even with some reluctance, simply that you may believe me when I say that this visit with you is prompted by a heart full of love and good will for you.

While all souls are equal in the eyes of God, and all are infinitely precious to Him, I must confess that the task of spreading a knowledge of Christ's teachings among my own countrymen makes a greater natural appeal to me, and seems to have first call upon my affections and my loyalty than even the apostolic work of carrying it to the people of the Orient. That is most important, indeed, and I view with profound admiration the heroic missionaries who wear out their lives in foreign lands in breaking the bread of truth to the natives there. With about sixty millions of my fellow citizens, however, bound to me by the strong ties of a common love for my country, and a common tongue, who are unaffiliated with any

Christian Church, I feel the special urgency of the obligation of sharing my treasure with my own immediate neighbors and countrymen—inviting them first of all into full membership in the household of the faith.

NOT PROPAGANDA

In so doing, my efforts are not to be viewed as those of a propagandist in the sense in which that term has come to be used since the World War. In those hectic days our country and those of the Old World as well were flooded with propaganda designed to portray the opposing forces and all their works in a wholly evil light. The aim seemed to be to increase our own morale by inducing us to hate the enemy with a more intense animosity. We know now that much of the propaganda consisted of lies, half-truths, highly colored accounts of alleged atrocities, and a suppression of the enemy's version of all occurrences. When we discovered after the armistice, how much of the propaganda was colored and distorted, and how many

falsehoods had gained currency and respectability under the camouflage of patriotic propaganda, we rightly developed a distaste for the propagandist who seeks to influence the belief of people by a one-sided and unfair representation of evidence.

I share that distaste. I would never wish to lead a person into the Catholic faith by a misrepresentation of the credentials of either the Protestant or the Catholic religion. No Church, I think, has suffered more from such misrepresentation than my own. I have nothing but abhorrence for those who indulge in such unscrupulous and dishonest tactics.

My appeal is to the intellect not to the emotions. For the end desired is not a temporary commitment arising from an emotional appeal, but that permanent loyalty that results only from a true intellectual conviction. It alone can weather the storms and trials of a lifetime. There will be no importuning, no high-pressure salesmanship. Among the several hundred whom I have been privileged to

receive into the Church, I have never yet asked a single one to embrace the faith. I explain it, and leave it to the judgment of the individual to accept or to reject in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience. For faith implies the free assent of the will after the intellect achieves conviction. Without freedom and internal conviction there can be no real faith, but merely its outward shell.



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An Investigation Of The Catholic Religion

There is no subject so worthy of investigation as the Catholic religion. It has exercised a profound and enduring influence upon the thought and the life of humanity. No person can aspire to be truly educated, who remains ignorant of the one institution in the world to-day which traces its origin directly back to Jesus Christ. Founded by our divine Lord in the year 33 A. D., the Catholic Church has continued in existence throughout nineteen centuries, carrying on her divinely-appointed mission of preaching the gospel of Christ to every nation under the sun.

At the present time the Catholic Church numbers over 325,000,000 of human beings — 100,000,000 more than the combined membership of all Protestant religious organizations. While her members are of every race

and tongue, having different racial temperaments and diverse national traditions, they are all bound together by the strong bonds of a common faith. They believe the same doctrines, receive the same sacraments, and recognize the same spiritual head. The unity is not merely in name, but in reality. A Catholic can hear Mass, receive the sacraments, and assist at the devotions in any Catholic church in the world, and feel as much at home as if he were worshipping in his own parish church.

During the World War it was a source of surprise for many of our young men drawn into the army from rural districts and small towns, where there were few Catholics, to discover that the one Church they could be certain of finding in practically every village and city in Europe was the Catholic Church. Other churches, familiar enough in the United States, were found to be almost unheard of in the countries of Europe.

While it was a source of comfort

for the Catholic soldiers to be able thus to continue the practice of their faith in any country in Europe, it was also the occasion of affording many hundreds of thousands of our fellow-citizens a new insight into the world-wide character of the Catholic Church, which would have been scarcely possible for them to have secured within the narrow horizons which bounded their previous outlook. For the first time they got glimmerings of a religion that was truly international and interracial, and which sank its roots deep into the antiquity of the history of Christendom. In other words, they went a long distance along the pathway that leads to the discovery of that most essential truth, that *Catholicity and historical Christianity are identical.*

Catholicity Is Historical Christianity

The only form of Christianity—save for a few sects which cut themselves off from the centre of unity and for the most part subsequently

withered away—which can be found in the history of Christendom for the first sixteen centuries is the Catholic Church. Blot her from the pages of history, and the Bible as well as Christianity disappear from the face of the earth. Without her Protestantism would not exist, for Protestantism is founded upon the private interpretation of Holy Scripture. And since the books of the Bible constituting both the Old and the New Testament, were determined solely by the authority of the Catholic Church, without the Church there would have been no Bible, and hence no Protestantism. The Catholic Church is therefore the one *central fact* in the religious history of Christendom.

Not only is the Catholic Church the largest religious organization in the world today, but it is the only institution that has survived the fall of the Roman Empire. When that great world empire fell beneath the successive onslaughts of the vast hordes of barbarians that poured in upon her from the North and the

East, the Church proceeded to Christianize and civilize them. In literal terms, she made the captor captive. In so doing she clearly showed that her mission was not merely to the Jews, the Greeks, or the Romans, but to all mankind. At this early date she displayed the Catholicity inherent within her very nature by opening her arms as wide to the barbarian Vandal, Visigoth, or Hun as to the mighty Roman or the cultured Greek. To that mark of Catholicity or universality she has always clung, as being the very imprint of the Divine upon her.

How Can They Be Reputed Educated?

How can one then justly claim to be educated who is ignorant of the history of the institution, which has been the most potent single factor in shaping the life and the thought of Western civilization? It established schools and universities throughout the world, and inspired painters, sculptors, and musicians in the achievement of their master-

pieces. It fostered a love of literature and encouraged investigation of the secrets of nature, and thus laid the foundations of modern science. As that penetrating student of the history of human culture, Eugene Savage, Professor of Art at Yale University, aptly declared in a recent lecture at which I was present: "All that separates the white man from barbarism is the history of the Christian Church." That Church, as I have pointed out, is the Catholic Church, since it was the only Christian Church in existence during those ages of transition and for many centuries afterward.

Is it not to be expected that a Church which spans so many centuries, which is so intimately interwoven into the daily life and thought of hundreds of millions of people, and which colors their whole outlook and shapes their sense of values, will be at times misunderstood and misrepresented? Not only is it evident that at times her teachings are misunderstood, but also that at other times they are deliber-

ately misrepresented by hostile critics who wish to curtail her growth and influence. It is so much easier to set up a man of straw, and with much gusto demolish him, than it is to face a real foe. To this temptation many critics of the Church, seeking to refute her claim to the universal allegiance of mankind, have fallen easy victims.

Common Misrepresentations

As evidence of this, I would ask my non-Catholic reader, if he has not heard one or more of the following widely-spread misrepresentations of Catholic belief and practice?

1. The Catholic Church forbids her members to read the Bible.
2. Priests charge money for absolving penitents in confession from their sins.
3. Priests claim that for certain money payments they can secure the release of departed souls from purgatory. As one friendly narrator explained it to me, "For a certain fee, a priest will lift a soul from the bottom pit of purgatory to a place near the top. Then for a little more

he will lift the soul out altogether." There are many more slanders of this nature, widely circulated and apparently believed by millions of our separated brethren. But these will suffice to indicate the general derogatory nature of such misrepresentations.

Of course, as every Catholic knows, there is not a particle of truth in any of the statements. And yet, in my sixteen years of experience in conducting inquiry classes for many hundreds of people, I have never encountered a class in which the majority had not been assured of the truth of one or more of the above mentioned falsehoods. These inquirers were drawn largely from a university constituency, and might fairly be presumed to come from homes somewhat better informed than the average. The saddest part is that some report hearing such statements from the pulpits of Protestant churches. Does it not seem almost incredible that ministers pledged to preach the gospel of the Prince of peace and of truth, should

so prostitute the pulpit of their churches as to render it a vehicle for the imparting of falsehoods and calumnies against their Catholic neighbors?

Do you recall, my dear non-Catholic reader, hearing such representations of Catholic belief from the lips of a minister in a Christian church? If you do, you can be sure that he is an unreliable herald of the gospel of Christ. For either he was in good faith, and believed such preposterous statements to be true, or else he was in bad faith, and deliberately circulated a canard which he knew to be false. Now if he was in good faith, he was guilty of criminal negligence in not using ordinary prudence and diligence to ascertain the truth or falsity of charges seriously reflecting on the good name of many millions of his fellow-citizens. If he looked into any one of the thousands of books approved by the Church as containing a correct exposition of her belief and practice, or if he consulted any Catholic, he would speedily satisfy himself as

to the complete falsity of such charges.

On the other hand, if the minister knew at the time that they were unfounded and reflected merely the hatred of her enemies, and used his Christian pulpit for the further circulation of such slanders, you can see for yourself how far such an individual has deviated from the path of the true herald of Christ. For all such heralds are charged by Christ speaking through the solemn words of St. Paul: "Carefully study to present thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *rightly handling the word of truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15).

Campaign Slanders

The utilization of the machinery of the various non-Catholic churches, the Sunday-school, the church paper and evangelistic organizations directed by ministers, reached its climax in the Presidential campaign of 1928 when for the first time a Catholic was nominated by one of the two major parties for the Presi-

dency. The extent to which ministers and evangelists throughout the country used their pulpits to deliver political tirades against Governor Smith, not merely because he was opposed to the Prohibition Amendment, but because he was a Catholic and "in league with the Pope," was reported in the press of the nation at that time, and was shown to be very widespread. Especially in the churches of the South, the traditional stronghold of the Democratic party, were the denunciations of Smith and his Catholicism most scathing and vigorous.

Professor Schlesinger, of the Department of History at Harvard University, has collected a large number of church papers, pamphlets, periodicals, and leaflets distributed by the millions, which are teeming with vile cartoons of nuns, priests, bishops, and the Pope, and with vicious slanders of Catholic belief and practice. These were exhibited in a room at Harvard, known as the "Hall of Horrors." They will be preserved to show future genera-

tions the extent to which Christian churches used their pulpits and their official publications to poison the minds of millions of people with vile calumnies against twenty millions of their Catholic fellow-citizens. A somewhat similar collection of photostatic copies of such church publications and cartoons is being preserved at the Library of the University of Illinois, where it is available to all who wish to view it.

That there were many laymen as well as ministers who discountenanced such wholesale use of the machinery of the church to spread religious prejudice and foment hatred among the citizens of our country is undoubtedly true. Here and there noble voices were upraised in Protestant pulpits, by ministers who refused to be swept away by the wave of hysteria and emotional bitterness that was sweeping like wildfire across the land. Rising above the din and tumult of the mob, they proclaimed the duty of truthfulness and denounced the widespread slanders that were being circulated in

the name of religion against Catholic aspirants for public office.

Illustrations

The reaction of many high-minded non-Catholic citizens is illustrated by the following instance narrated to me by an educator of note. "I was the principal of a public high school," he said, "in a town in Illinois at the time of the Smith-Hoover campaign. From the pulpits of the three Protestant churches in that town there came tirades against Mr. Smith. It was not merely," he said, "because he opposed the present Prohibition law, but because he was a Catholic and 'would take his orders from the Pope.' The animus against him as a Catholic was evident throughout the denunciations. Besides the three Protestant churches," he said, "there is also a small, struggling Catholic church. About three months before the election, the priest there read to his congregation a letter from the Bishop. It stated that, in accordance with

the usual Catholic custom of separating religion from politics, no single word was to be spoken in the church concerning the political campaign then in progress.

“The contrast was striking. The temptation to fight back against those who were calumniating his religion must have been great. He took no notice, however, of them. He used his time each Sunday morning to preach to his people about Christ. Never once did he urge his congregation to take sides in the campaign that was then stirring the nation. Never once did he attempt to dictate or to indicate even by innuendo how his people should vote. Father, he said, I am a Protestant, and have been active in the work of my church. But I don't know of anything that has depressed me more than the spectacle of our churches rushing into the political campaign, using their pulpits for the fomenting of religious prejudice. It has robbed me of my enthusiasm for them, and alienated almost all my attachment for them. Whether I

shall ever recover it, only time will tell."

Shortly after the close of the Smith-Hoover campaign, I was honored with an invitation to address a large Methodist congregation on "Papal Infallibility and Its Bearing Upon the Rights of the State." In the period for answering questions that followed the lecture, a young man arose and made the following contribution to the discussion: "In the small rural community in which I live," he said, "the feeling ran high that if Smith were elected, America would be subject to papal domination. I recall one citizen telling another of the woes that would befall us. 'Why,' he said, 'the Pope will be the real ruler. He will dictate all the appointments to Smith. He will even try to get control of the Supreme Court. Things will be so bad,' he concluded, 'that before we know it, we won't be able to get our mail until it has first been censored by the Pope.'"

Such were the apprehensions which prevailed among millions of

our fellow citizens in the event of Smith's election to the presidency. This in spite of the fact that in the century and a half of our national existence there has never been a single instance of a Catholic proving false to his civic duties because of any pull exerted upon him by his religious faith. No matter how much men like Charles Marshall and H. L. Mencken may speculate about a theoretical conflict of civil and spiritual loyalties on the part of Catholics, the stark fact remains that no Catholic incumbent has ever yet discovered any obligation arising from his Catholic faith other than that which presses inexorably upon his conscience to discharge to the full the duties of his civil office. Far from finding any impediment to the fulfillment of his civic duties, the Catholic office-holder has found in the teachings of his Catholic faith the strongest incentive to their faithful and conscientious discharge. And it is to be noted that Catholics have held every important office in the land, being Governors of States,

Congressmen, Senators, and Chief Justices of the Supreme Court—every office save that only of the Presidency. Surely if there were any incompatibility between their civil allegiance and their spiritual loyalty, some one of the multitudes of Catholics who have held office in the course of our national existence, would have discovered that fact by now.

They Need the Light

In the light of the performances of so many ministers and evangelists who leaped into the limelight with their blood curdling recital of the secret machinations of Rome to control and capture America, misrepresenting the simplest tenets of the Catholic faith, one can see more clearly the foundation of the frank and courageous statement of Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, in calling attention to the woeful lack of proper educational attainments of a considerable portion of the Protestant ministry and its bearing upon "the

widespread intolerance which has recently had so many unhappy manifestations throughout the United States." In referring to the educational background of students for the Protestant ministry, he says: "Many of these theological students have no college training whatever, and many more have had a college training in whole or in part, which would not differ greatly from that offered by an average secondary school. In other words, the standard of intellectual and scholarly attainment is low. Not a few of the most distressing and widely-heralded of present-day happenings in the United States are traceable directly to this fact. Unhappily that 'illiterate ministry' which it was the purpose of the pious founders of Harvard College to forfend, is now, after three hundred years, in ample evidence on every side. . . . If the full truth were said, it would probably be that the greatest obstacle at present to religious faith, religious conviction, and religious worship is the attitude and influence of a very

large proportion of the poorly endowed and poorly educated Protestant clergy" (Nicholas Murray Butler, Annual Report of the President of Columbia University, 1925, pp. 50 and 51. Columbia University Press, N. Y.).

The Fair-Minded Are Many

In citing the statement of President Butler, and in pointing out non-Catholic agencies which have lent themselves to the circulation of misrepresentations of Catholic belief and practice, I do not for a moment wish to appear in the light of making sweeping reflections upon the Protestant ministry as a whole. That would be grossly unjust. There is no doubt in my mind that the number who consciously lend themselves to such unfair practices are in the marked minority. The overwhelming majority would surely repudiate such un-Christian actions. I want to pay my tribute to the honesty and sincerity of Protestant ministers of my acquaintance. Indeed the ministers with whom

it has been my privilege to work in the University community in which I labor, have been men of high spiritual ideals, eminently fair and uniformly courteous.

It has been my rare privilege to address large congregations in Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Congregational, and Disciples of Christ churches, setting before them the teachings of the Church on such subjects as Papal Infallibility, the Power of the Priest to Forgive Sins, the Relations of Church and State, the Temporal Power of the Pope, the Indissolubility of Christian Marriage, the Structure and Organization of the Catholic Church. In every instance I found the people hungry and eager to know the real teachings of the Church. After the lecture I answered questions from the audience. The entire discussion was always conducted in a spirit of friendliness and good will. In every case the meeting was closed with an expression of gratitude to me for clearing away many misconceptions of the teachings of the

Church which they had previously entertained.

It was the conviction of all that a better understanding of the faith of Catholics, so often misrepresented and misunderstood, was conducive to a better community spirit, and therefore to better citizenship in our American democracy. For an understanding of the real teachings of the Church speedily removes the basis of societies of organized bigotry, which spring into existence from the apprehensions and distrust created by the misrepresentation of the Catholic position, especially on such a topic as the alleged divided allegiances of Catholics to the government of the United States. The true weapon against them is not force or heat, but light. For with the widespread dissemination of the real teachings of the Catholic Church, they disappear because they do not have a leg to stand on.

From what has been said, I think you will see, my dear non-Catholic friend, that in asking for an unbiased

investigation of the Catholic faith, I am actuated not only by a love of the Church which has been so bountiful and loving a Mother to me, but also by the love I bear my non-Catholic fellow citizens and our common country. An advocacy of the reasonableness and truth of the teachings of the Catholic Church is surely compatible with both esteem and affection for my countrymen of different faiths and of no faith at all.

Obtain Official Statements Of Faith

In view of the many agencies circulating misstatements about the belief and practice of the Catholic Church, is it any wonder then that you, my dear non-Catholic friend, have been influenced in your attitude toward her? Indeed it would be rather a cause for marvelling if, in mingling freely with non-Catholics for many years, you did not hear some of these allegations against the Catholic faith. It is not even unlikely that by dint or repetition you have come to believe that there must be some foun-

dation to them. Where there is so much smoke, there must be some fire, one is apt to say.

To determine then whether the representation of Catholic belief and practice given out by critics is correct or false, is it not necessary to have recourse to some duly authorized exposition of the Catholic faith? Open any book approved by the Church as containing an accurate statement of Catholic belief, and see if you can find anything remotely resembling the statements given out by her enemies. Surely if you wish to find out what the Church really teaches, you will go to her, not to her opponents. She makes no effort to conceal any of her doctrines, but on the contrary publishes them in every language, and instructs her ministers to preach them in season and out of season—even from the housetops. Any priest, any educated Catholic will tell you gladly and without hesitation exactly what the Church believes. In practically every Catholic home, you will find an authorized catechism or a

book explaining the doctrines of the Church.

If you wish to receive a thorough and complete exposition of every Catholic teaching and practice, as well as the reasons behind them, why not consult a priest?

See the Specialist

This is a day of specialists. Why not avail yourself of a specialist in religion? Unlike the specialists in medicine, the priest offers his expert services gratis. He receives his reward in knowing that he has substituted light for darkness, has replaced misunderstanding with a clear knowledge of the truths revealed by our divine Redeemer for the enlightenment and salvation of mankind.

“There is no Freemasonry,” as Cardinal Gibbons has pointed out, “in the Catholic Church; she has no secrets to keep back. She has not one set of doctrines for Bishops and Priests, and another for the laity. She has not one creed for the initiated and another for outsiders. Everything in the Catholic Church is open and above

board. She has the same doctrines for all—for the Pope and the peasant.”

May I suggest then, dear friend, that you begin your investigation of the Catholic faith with an open mind? It will make your study immensely more profitable. For, if you start with a closed mind, saying to yourself, “I know in advance these teachings are all wrong, I’ll simply listen to them, but I’ll be trying all the while to find a way of escape from their conclusions,” you will not be playing fair with yourself. You will derive more profit if you honestly try first to understand the doctrines of the Catholic religion and the reasons behind them. Let them sink into your mind and have free play therein, until they exert the influence which their cogency demands. Then it will be time enough to examine them critically. I have had persons in my inquiry classes, who have cheated themselves by devoting more of their mental energy to finding arguments against a viewpoint of the Church

than to the mastering of the reasons upon which the viewpoint was based. In order to do justice to any subject-matter, be it science, literature, philosophy, or religion, it is necessary that the effort be made first of all thoroughly to understand it.

The Catholic Church asks no more and no less. For she is convinced of the objective weight and cogency of her credentials when honestly understood. She buttresses them with no appeal to the emotions. She is perfectly willing to have them stand or fall, be accepted or rejected on their own intrinsic merits. She is convinced that if they are looked at by the eye of reason, unclouded by the mists of preconceived prejudice, they will carry conviction to the open mind. As unerringly as the magnet draws the steel, so does truth attract the human mind when no obstacle is placed in its way. Prejudice, bitterness, antipathy are the obstacles which rob truth of its capacity to convince, by closing the gateway to the mind.

