

My Religion

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SOUVENIR

ONE'S religion usually costs one something, but in the case of "My Religion" I made fifty dollars out of it. This is how it happened.

Ruth, who reluctantly admitted the rare distinction of a "First in English" (Oxford) but who knew practically nothing about catholicism, had asked my ghostly advice about the religious education of Joyce, a young Anglo-Indian niece. I consulted Father Kelly who in turn produced a catechism. copy

Father Kelly's catechism proved to be full of bombs.

When I noticed a particularly provocative twinkle in her grave eyes I knew that in the course of hearing Joyce her catechism Ruth had exploded what she called "another protestant myth". First a purgatorial myth went up in smoke, then indulgences were blown into their proper place in the communion of saints, eventually even papal infallibility became inevitable in the white Véry light of logic.

Father Kelly had lit the fuse of a heavenly illuminant.

One day, by way of flattering my pen, Ruth told me I must come to the rescue of the church. It seemed a series of articles entitled "My Re-

ligion" were being contributed to a weekly paper by more or less literary and religious persons, and that my Holy Mother Church appeared to lack a champion. So it was done.

At the time of publication I failed to make the usual acknowledgements to the sources of my inspiration. I do so now:

To Ruth, from whom I learned to love fair phrases of honest English.

For her there are now no myths, protestant or catholic, because she is in heaven. I can picture her wry smile on realizing it was invincible ignorance rather than an Oxford degree, that got her there.

To Joyce, who I am sure found catechism as taught by pious nuns less stimulating than as taught by an agnostic aunt.

To Father Kelly, with his fine catechism, who happily remains to encourage amateur investigators of eternal truths, and mundane problems.

And so, fired by the kindness of our Good Neighbors of the Catholic Information Society, Father Kelly's, Ruth's, and Joyce's, my rocket shoots off on its journey to those who will understand.

HARRY BALDWIN

Ottawa, Canada.

MY RELIGION

by

HARRY BALDWIN

Treasurer, Canadian Broadcasting Corp.

RELIGION is, for me, that which bridges the gap between the natural and the supernatural—the ladder, as Francis Thompson puts it, “pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross.” The Catholic Church assures me, in terms infallible, that she is this ladder, and I observe that not a rung is loose, despite the uninterrupted traffic of nearly two thousand years on this the most popular route heavenward. Outside the Church there are hundreds of more modern and less laborious methods of salvation, but never have I heard it claimed that any one of these methods is sure, or even definitely superior to the others. I am, therefore, not tempted off my ladder.

My creed is the Nicene. But had I been one of those violent men at Nicea—one of those of whom it is said that they “were poorly enough acquainted with Christian theology”—I should have pleaded for a re-arrangement of the clauses of the creed so that “Et unam sanctam Catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam” would come at the very beginning, instead of near the end, where we now find it.* For without this “one Holy Catholic and apostolic Church” to persist in the assurance of the truth of the awful dogmas of Christianity, who is going to believe them? If in the year 325 A.D. anathemas of the fathers of the Church, supported by the material force of the conqueror Constantine were required to stamp out error, what chance has the modern Christian of avoiding fundamental confusion if his faith be founded on nothing firmer than a higher criticized Bible

~~*I am indebted to my dear and learned friend Father H. G. Hiscocks (of what he will forgive me for referring to as “the Anglo obedience”) for pointing out that I am wrong in ascribing the “et unam sanctam catholicam” bit to the men of Nicea; it having been added a century and a quarter later at Chalcedon. For this correction I thank my friend, and murmur “mea culpa” for myself and the many good priests (of what Father Hiscocks would call “the Roman obedience”) who, having read “My Religion”, failed to rebuke me. One up for Canterbury!—H.B.~~

or the preaching of good men who have agreed to disagree?

I am a Christian; but I am a Christian because I am a Catholic.

And why am I a Catholic? I suppose because I was born and "raised" one. At any rate I have been spared the trouble of searching for my religion.

CHURCH EITHER HATED OR LOVED —
Contact with the supernatural is what I want. The supernatural quality of the Catholic Church compels my attention. No other form of Christianity competes. She does such daring, intimate things. Is it any wonder that she is hated where she is not loved? She starts interfering before her children's birth. She insists that the unconceived be given a chance of eternal happiness. She is more than a midwife in her solicitude, and indeed in extreme cases she steps between the doctor and the midwife and insists upon baptizing the infant in "indecent" haste. She is uneasy and cannot rest until the very new-born babe is brought to the Church and there given its first sacramental bath. Almost the first thing upon which the baby's eyes learn to focus is the crucifix. Be-

fore the child can speak it is taught the sign of the cross and among its first words are those of prayer.

At seven or thereabouts the child is brought to Mass and Confession, a little later it is given Holy Communion. Religious education is, where possible, imparted at the same time, and by the same teachers, as secular education. The Church is always nagging. "You must do this" and "you mustn't do that." "Here is a fast," and "there a feast." "Come to confession" and "go to Mass." She marries you and orders you to have children. She won't divorce you. You may disobey her, you cannot forget or ignore her. **CHURCH NEVER FORGETS —**

And when your poor gasping body struggles resentfully against the approaching defection of the soul, the Church comes and soothes you with her holy unguents, administers Viaticum, and then, standing by your bedside, commends your departing spirit to the care of her saints in heaven, that as a friendly body-guard they may attend it before the throne of God the Judge. But not even then does the Church cease her solicitude. The body must go to church for the last time, to be present

at the Mass which is being offered, not for the family and mourners, not in thanksgiving for vague blessings, not in memory of the soul, but as a sacrifice for the dead man whose body lies at the foot of the altar. The body is finally buried in a grave which the Church has blessed and dedicated to this use, and long after the mourners have wearied of remembering the soul the Church forgets not, but keeps on recalling it every year on All Souls Day.

I know no other religion which will make such a fuss about my immortal soul, and which will go to such endless pains to see that it is not neglected by me, or by the saints, whose prayers one supposes to be most salutary. Of course, it may be charged that all this pother is unnecessary, and that my particular soul is not worth so much attention. Be that as it may, this "individual service" is the very essence of Catholicism.

I am aware of the popular reproach which is directed against those who are supposed to take the matter of their souls too seriously. They are accused of being the ultimate insulars, spiritual profiteers, and selfish would-be preemptors of heavenly rewards. This re-

proach may be merited, but I do not find that those whose first pursuit is immortal salvation are generally guilty of worldly selfishness. Indeed, those who specifically dedicate their whole lives to the business of saving their own souls are the very ones who are breathlessly engaged in caring for the welfare—and, more often than not, the purely material welfare—of others. This, whatever the motive, is at all events beneficial to society.

ARE NUNS NEUROTIC?
Nuns are so neurotic about the condition of their souls as to shut themselves up in convents and pray extravagantly, but their neurasthenia does not prevent them from managing huge hospitals, assisting at major operations, housing and feeding the aged and infirm, and following—in their inconvenient habits—explorers and pioneers into the frozen north or the parched desert. Young men are seized with this same panic about eternity, and becoming Christian Brothers, forswear the world and vow themselves to poverty, chastity and obedience; but in spite of their long prayers and early Masses, you will find these same young men

competing with men of the world, at ~~Normal school or University~~, in examinations which are to qualify them as teachers of the poor, or guardians of recalcitrant boys. le

Those madmen, the Trappists, who are so afraid of the world, the flesh and the devil, that they take vows of perpetual silence, never eat meat, have but one meal a day, and begin their devotions at two o'clock in the mornings on week days and half-past one on Sundays—even these cowardly men manage to snatch enough time from their prayers and Masses to run a successful agricultural college and experimental farm, where the farm lads of Quebec are taught how to breed prize-winning stock of every description.

Can it be that “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent carry it away”?

All things considered, I accept with considerable equanimity the implication that to place the matter of one's own eternal salvation first is to place the love of one's neighbor not only second, but last and least.

CHURCH "COMPENSATORS"

To be a good Catholic is hard, but to suffer bad ones is easy. In mechanics we learn of a certain part of a machine which is known as a "compensator." The Catholic Church is full of compensators. They are often described as paradoxes. For instance, I am only mildly scandalized if I encounter a wicked priest in Paris, because I know a hundred holy priests in Pittsburgh^{P.} or, when I hear some horrid tale about a nunnery in Montevideo, I think of my aunt, the nun, and two saintly cousins, in convents in Montreal; and when the fat and lazy monks of Brazil—or of the "dark ages"—are trotted out, I have a vision of the lean and eager missionary priests of British Columbia fainting with fatigue.

There are other and most efficient "compensators" which preserve the rhythm of the machinery of my religion. The horrors of the Inquisition in South America are to me a little less unsettling when I recall the tortured Jesuit missionaries of North America; the unhappy affair of Galileo is overlooked in the light of the Church's en-

thusiasm for the monk Mendel and the scientist Pasteur; the pomp of papal functions at St. Peter's is justified by the poverty of the many Masses said on soap boxes in Manitoba; and even such horrors as Mozart's "Twelfth Mass" and Gounod's "Ave Maria" can be endured when one is at the same time encouraged to indulge a passion for Palestrina.

HOW RELIGION AFFECTS ME

I am in no way insulated from non-Catholic influences. My schools have been public and Protestant. My family and social relations are largely with people who look upon my religion as an unfortunate accident or, at best, a harmless but rather vulgar superstition. From those with whom I associate in what is reputed to be the most anti-Catholic city in America I have encountered practically no bigotry. Generally I find that concerning Catholicism people are as indifferent as they are ill-informed. Few of the old "No Popery" bogies have survived the prevailing flood of broadmindedness. At any rate, I seldom encounter more than superficial prejudices against Catholics.

But I do not put this down to any particular sympathy for things Catholic; I doubt if I should lose a friend were I to announce myself a Confucian.

“O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we touch thee!”

This, to quote Francis Thompson again, is what my religion does for me.



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hundred, from:

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Mr. Baldwin, the author of this treatise, is treasurer of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The photograph reproduced on the cover is not that of Mr. Baldwin; it is intended merely to represent any one of the average 400,000,000 "Catholic Baldwins" throughout the world who possess in the practice of their Holy Faith "that peace which surpasseth all understanding."

For brief, courteous explanations of anything Catholic, call a Catholic Rectory, or ask one of your friends to take you to a priest. You will find him well educated and very obliging. And, of course, you will not be committing yourself in any way. Why not do it today?

