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*The Questions They Always Ask.*  
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by DANIEL A. LORD, S. J.

**A Queen's Work Publication**



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# THE QUESTIONS THEY ALWAYS ASK

## *Introducing the Questioners*

These questions have all been asked me during the course of retreats. They are not personal questions—that is, the questioners did not present them to me personally.

Instead the questions were dropped into a question box and were answered in the course of one of the retreat talks.

So the people who did the asking are Catholic. They represent however boys and girls, young men and women, adults of various ages, and for the most part people of better than ordinary circumstances.

That is why I was a little surprised to find that everywhere and always the questions were pretty much the same. Whether the questioners were men or women, high school, college, or university, alumni or alumnae, the laity at work in the world, the questions fell into easily recognized grooves.

Of course there were occasionally the unusual and different questions. These lent an element of surprise and suspense to the more routine question-box questions. Some of the questions turned out to be rather profound. Some were highly personal and individual. A few were intended to amuse the answerer or to relieve the solemnity with deliberate frivolity.

None of these unusual questions appear in this little booklet.

I have selected the questions which are plain run of the mill.

I chose them because I felt that there must be a great many people who want the answers to them. For if a question box proved anything to me—beyond the fact that a great many people have a great many problems that they

want answered—it was that human nature is human nature no matter where you find it.

Not a very profound observation, that.

Just the same it may reassure a troubled soul to find out that other souls are troubled by the very same problem that vexes him.

And despite the number of times that these questions have been answered, there are evidently thousands who are still posing them as if the questions had never been asked before.

Frankly I confess that the answers given here do not pretend to be complete. Indeed I have in many times past devoted full-sized booklets to many of the questions which I have answered here within a page. You'll pardon a reference to my own booklets. At the end of this booklet I have listed pamphlets which cover fully the questions I handle briefly and most sketchily here.

One thing however cannot escape any man who ever opens a question box. It is the age-old fact that the overwhelming number of so-called difficulties against faith are not against faith at all. They are concerned with morals. The good man is already far on his way toward being a believing man. The man who finds himself assailed by moral problems is likely to think that his faith is being tempted. The virtuous girl usually finds faith extremely easy. The temptation that comes to her in a form "tall, dark, and handsome" is likely to look like a frightful assault upon the truth of the Catholic Church.

Once a man has lost faith, he is not so likely to be disturbed by moral problems. Indeed the man who has stopped worrying about his morality has probably brushed off his faith—and vice versa.

So though one comes to recognize that the Ten Commandments are a wonderful safeguard for the Apostles' Creed, one must also reassure the troubled questioner. Only when you stop being tempted fiercely are you likely to need to worry. When your faith seems to waver, then is an excellent time for you to examine your moral conscience. When

vice grows attractive, that's a first-rate time to make a strong act of faith.

Needless to say, this booklet is not at all like the book that I regard as one of the most important books ever written. Years ago Father Bertrand Conway of the Paulist Fathers wrote—and bless God that he did—out of the questions asked him by non-Catholics and by wavering Catholics his masterly book “The Question Box.” I have my own personal gratitude to pay to that book. I have in the course of time recommended it to literally thousands.

This booklet deals with questions asked by Catholics. I should be happy though if it served to remind my readers that Father Conway's “The Question Box” belongs, not in the library, but on the desk of every Catholic who even pretends to be educated.

In the interval here are some questions that have been asked me. And here is the way that I have answered them.

Christmas Eve

1942

***What is the best age at which a man should marry?***

When he is an emotional and a social adult. That means when he is able sanely to meet life inside and outside himself, to handle life with maturity and some measure of self-reliance.

When is that?

That depends upon the man, his upbringing, his country, the age in which he is living, and many other factors.

***Do you think that young people today are better or worse than young people used to be?***

My answer to that is perhaps in the nature of dodging: Whatever they actually are, they ought to be better.

I find it vastly annoying, to say the least, to run into these self-confessed historians of morals and customs who blurt, "The young people of today are no different from what young people were in the days of Rome or Greece or even of Babylon or Assyria or Egypt. They are neither better nor worse. But let's not be hard on them. To the older generation the younger generation is always a mystery if not actually a menace. History merely repeats itself."

And that I call the sloppiest kind of history.

Have these supposed historians never heard of the coming of Christ and the development of the Christian era? Are they going to suggest that life in Christian countries today (we prescind necessarily from the communists' and the nazis' deliberate submerging into paganism) is no different from what it was back in the cruel ages before the Savior?

These happen to be Christian times. If young people are not insulted when they are compared with the young men and women of pagan, barbarous, and callous pre-Christian days, they should be.

The hideous things sanctioned then by a heartless, selfish, godless or false-god society have been in the main abolished. We no longer go down to the market place and buy ourselves a cook or ask the selling price of a good gardener or an upstairs maid. We do not go to the Yankee Stadium to see men slaughter each other or prisoners fed to the lions from the Bronx zoo. We no longer worship ob-



scene gods and make a religion of imitating their worst vices. We do not believe that a filthy king is really an incarnate god. And if a ruler starts to act like a whimsical maniac, we in Christian countries can call out the electorate.

This is a very different world, a Christian world. It is a world which has accepted in principle—no matter how far short it is in practice—the Ten Commandments and softened the brute side of man's nature with the principles and practices of Christ's lovely law. We profit by nineteen hundred years of experience with the personality and example of Christ Himself. The glowing image of Mary has had its effect. The saints have not lived in vain. The nations have called themselves Christendom and have built up a code that regards the rights of the weak, the reverence due to women, the care that must surround childhood.

So simply to compare our young people with the young people of pagan lands and ancient day is ridiculous. Equivalently that would be to say, "Our whole modern world is expected to be vastly better than the world was in the ages before Christ, but we can be content if young people are merely as good as were the youth of ancient Egypt, Babylon, Rome, and Greece."

Yet the answer is still not complete.

Modern young people should be better than their fathers and mothers were in their youth. Whether they actually are or are not better, we can leave to their own consciences. That they should be better is plain from a few contemporaneous facts.

To modern youth has been given the strength of frequent communion.

They have been part of the reopening of the liturgical movement, which stresses their royal priesthood.

They have the invitation to collaboration with the bishops in Catholic Action.

For them the Catholic-school system has been enormously developed.

They have been spared the perils of persecution and its rigors. They are the children of a Catholicity that has been permitted to know the peace and freedom of these United States.

As Americans they have known amazing natural advantages.

In a word, are we wrong to think of them as the favored sons and daughters of God?

So when I am asked if they are as good as pagans are, I want to shout at the absurdity of the question. When I compare their opportunities with those of the people even twenty, forty, a hundred years ago, I can see their numberless advantages.

If they are merely as good as the young people of generations ago, that is not good at all. They have a right to demand of themselves—as we have a right to expect of them—that they should be vastly better.

*How can the Church accept money from evil men? Why doesn't it investigate the source of gifts and decline them when the givers have made their money in ways that are not honorable?*

Do you suppose that this is what the pharisee had in mind when Magdalen gave Christ the gift of the precious ointment? "Just think how she got the money with which she bought that perfume!" they may have murmured, in their beards. "How can He accept it?"

If a gift from an evil man bound you or me—or a priest or the Church—to partnership in his evil, of course the gift could not be accepted. But then it would not be a gift at all; it would be a retainer, or a bribe, or an actual salary.

But if the gift is given outright, why, I wonder, should so many modern pharisees think that the gift should be refused?

It is possible that the evil man is sick of his evil and would love to get rid of his ill-gotten goods. How better could he dispose of those goods than to the poor, to the charitable works of the Church, to God Himself?

Perhaps, though still bound to his sin, he has a real impulse of charity or mercy. Can we refuse him the right to exercise a virtue just because he is guilty of many sins?

It may be that his gift will give bread to a poor family, or education to a poor child, or a beautiful altar to the joy

of the faithful worshippers. Why not? Would you deprive people of happiness or good things by turning away money just because you disapproved of the way that the money was earned?

In itself there is nothing more neutral than money. The same money can buy flowers for a mother or a Tommy gun for a murderer, can pay for the cure of a sick child or the ruin of innocence, can build a house for God or an abode of sin, can be offered in gratitude to the Savior or be used to bribe a Federal judge. Money is, as we hear a thousand times, merely a medium of exchange. We give something to be used for something, but the thing in itself has no value outside its use.

I find it hard to understand why sinners should not be allowed to use their money for good, why they must—because the money was sinfully earned—use their money sinfully. Why can they not on occasion be allowed to practice virtue? Why can they not be allowed to give their money to noble causes, for selfless, higher ends? And why can not a good man or woman be the instrument of the better use of money that has been sinfully earned?

For my own part I do not find sinners notably generous. I do not see grafters pouring out their graft money on God. I do not see the keepers of houses of ill-fame using some of their receipts to endow orphanages. Usually wealthy sinners spend their wealth as they earned it—selfishly.

But if every time we were given a gift for some important religious, educational, or charitable purpose we demanded from the giver a clean bill of moral health and a record of just where the bills had been before they came to us, I'm afraid we'd have little time for good works. And isn't the attitude of the modern pharisee a little odd: that the doctor may take money to cure the grafter's baby and not ask that the money first be morally sterilized, and that the priest may not take similar money to be used for the good of souls?

It all sounds a little carping to me.

### *Is kissing a sin?*

This is probably the question that is found most frequently in all question boxes.

The very fact that it is constantly asked indicates a strangely troubled conscience.

But let's reach our answer by a slightly roundabout route.

A kiss is a sacred and lovely symbol used to express a deep and beautiful emotion.

A mother kisses her child. A daughter kisses her father to welcome him home from the wars. Husband and wife kiss to express their unity of mind and heart. A witness in court may kiss the Bible to show his respect for truth. A grateful person may be moved to kiss the hand of his benefactor. In times past soldiers and knights kissed the hilts of their swords because these were the weapons they used to defend right, honor, and truth.

A saint kisses the crucifix. Magdalen covered the feet of the Savior with kisses. Exiles have been so glad to see their native lands that they have thrown themselves down and kissed the ground. A romantic lover kisses the hand of his lady or the flower she tosses him. A son will kiss the locket that holds the curl of his dead mother's hair. A patriot will kiss the flag he loves. A Catholic kisses the ring of a bishop in sign of devotion to the Church; he may kiss the relic of a saint. The priest kisses reverently the altar on which rests the Eucharistic body of the Lord.

Undoubtedly a kiss is something sacred, dignified, and lovely.

Quite clearly then in itself a kiss is not a sin. If it were, it would be impossible to explain why kisses can under circumstances like these be beautiful, impressive, dignified, sacred, utterly lovely.

Now a new attitude has developed toward kissing. The kiss has become a casual and a careless thing. Too many ask, not "How can I keep my kisses for the moment when they will be the symbol of something noble and fine?" but "How easygoing can I be about kissing? How prodigal can I be of my kisses? How far can I go with my kisses before I actually commit sin?"

And that is no credit to our modern morality or customs.

There is no slightest doubt in the mind of any decent man or woman that kissing between unmarried people be-

comes sinful when passion takes over. Any normal person is fully aware that under certain circumstances passion was meant by nature to take over. The kiss was by God and nature intended to make men and women grow passionately excited. The kiss is under those conditions the normal and natural prelude to physical union.

So to use a kiss to lead to all of this outside of marriage is most assuredly wrong.

But it's pretty shabby to measure our conduct entirely in terms of sin.

There is something rather terrifying about modern customs that carelessly or deliberately go toward the cheapening of so sacred and lovely a thing as a kiss.

Let's say that this boy takes this girl out for an evening. At the end of the evening, though he may never see her again, he expects her to pay for her entertainment with a kiss. Why?

This girl goes out with the young man she met quite recently. If he didn't try to kiss her at the end of the evening, she hurries to her mirror to see what's wrong with herself.

This young couple have nothing special to say to each other, nothing particularly interesting to do; so they fill in the dull interludes with counterfeit love-making.

Yet this same kiss will later on be expected to signify a lot of important things. It will be the symbol of love between the young man and the girl he asks to marry him and to be the mother of his children. It will be the sweet sign by which the girl consents. It will be the lovely expression of a mother's heart yearning over her first-born. It will be the last tribute that a son pays to his dying mother.

Even pagan nations are not this casual and careless about the kiss. The Japanese, certainly not of a notably high moral standard, regard as undignified, antisocial, and obscene the constant kissing manifested in the movies. What sort of new standard has made us think so lightly of an almost holy symbol?

Perhaps what we need is a new attitude toward this whole question. We had better stop measuring our conduct merely by the question "When does kissing become sinful?"

A kiss is quite too sacred a thing to be thrown away on chance strangers. A girl should not be expected to pay with kisses for a hamburger and a coke. A boy should not be asked to prove with kisses that he thinks a girl pretty.

It is human to be careful not to waste precious things. We do not squander our money on strangers. The salute that we give to the Flag we do not offer to low, base objects. Our attitude toward a kiss should fall in line with these other attitudes.

A kiss was meant to be the seal upon a beautiful emotion, the promise of lasting love. It should not be the casual greeting of strangers, the stopgap when conversation grows dull, a cheap counterfeit of the noble, precious coin of true and noble love.

### *What about "necking" and "petting"?*

I wonder whether our language can offer queerer, cheaper words.

If you stop to look at this pair of words objectively, you have a desire to wince. "Necking" and "petting," like their predecessor "spooning," are pretty repulsive words. And as nouns or verbs they are even worse. "He's a heavy necker"... "She loves to pet."

Only the callousness produced by the constant use of these words keeps us from shuddering when we hear these vulgar expressions.

God meant men and women to fall in love. Love was in His divine plan a prelude to marriage. He hoped that His sons and daughters would know within marriage the happiness of love, the recompense of passion, and its resultant in peace and strength and mutual joy. He hoped that from marriage would come those sons and daughters who would be the heirs of His eternal kingdom.

All this was part of a divine scheme to unite men and women in the strongest of human emotions—love. To this union in love God meant to add His own divine love for humanity as He breathed into the body of human conception the eternal soul made to His image and likeness.

But instead of making love something beautiful and dignified, men and women, even youngsters, make of it some-

thing cheap, furtive, embarrassed, an occasion for shame and obscene laughter. For the strong, welding love of a man for his wife they substitute—in their own coarse words —“necking” and “petting.” They don’t marry and find love and all of love’s strong consequences. They play around with masquerades of love. They become moony over this girl; they get “a fierce crush” on that boy. They sit in parked cars and get mushy. They look on love, not as something constructive and noble, but as something dangerous and probably evil as they ask, “How far can we go before we kill the grace of God in our souls?”

Perhaps never before in all history have men and women talked so much about love and known so little of its depths and heights and real meaning as they do today. Once upon a time men and women prided themselves on loving so deeply and truly that life itself was too short for love’s complete fulfillment. Now they fall in and out of their shallow puddles of affection half a dozen times in the course of a season. Love has become so thinly spread that men and women can actually fall in love with several people simultaneously.

Of course they don’t really fall in love at all. No wonder it’s called puppy love and moon love and “carrying a torch” and “that way about . . .” and “off his head about . . .” and any of the dozen other cheap current expressions.

Yet all the while they run about expressing the signs of love in the most slapdash, vulgar fashion. They don’t wait to fall in love and then express love in noble gestures. They make caricatures of love and ply it with all the signs due to true love.

They say “I love you” to so many people and so often that the words mean hardly more than “It’s a nice day, isn’t it?” They misuse the sacred signs of love so shamefully that when a person who might have claimed their undying love does finally come along they have nothing left to give, no emotion left to receive.

We can with perfect justice feel desperately sorry for the youngsters who just in their teens begin to play at love by starting to “neck” and “pet.” They become physically as coarse, vulgar, and cheap as the ancient drinking cup.

In no time at all they are shopworn and manhandled and picked over. Before they are old enough for true love, they are sickened with false love. They are constantly going through little convulsions of juvenile emotion that they mistake for "the grand passion." They are in everlasting small flutters of excitement over some pretty face or masculine muscle, until they aren't able to recognize true affection even if they meet it in the brightest light of a May sun.

They are so constantly playing at love that they never get a chance to fall in love.

Poor kids! Later on one emotion slightly brighter or apparently more durable than the others comes their way. They think, "Perhaps this is love." But what is there new about it? They gave their cheap kisses easily and without meaning. The precious signs of love have long since become so frayed and tattered for them that they are now emotional beggars. They must try to establish on emotions that for years they have been squandering and tossing around and wasting in utter carelessness that sacred, beautiful, permanent union that God meant to be marriage. They enter marriage emotionally exhausted, love-weary, doomed to the failure of life's great natural career.

Not the youngest adolescent needs to be told that impure touches are always sinful. The silliest giggler needs no bearded guide to warn him or her that it is sinful to arouse one's passions or to engage in actions that arouse passions in others.

But are these the only facts to be considered by decent people?

A provident man does not spend millions on glass beads. A brilliant scholar does not waste his mind on trashy "true stories." A great artist does not chalk silly figures on a brick alley wall.

And a wise man and a decent woman do not buy with their God-given emotions a cheap evening of "necking" or a furtive hour of "petting" or fake love-making or the vulgar imitations of love. They do not throw away on people, they'll scarcely remember by name a year from now the lovely signs by which a man and a woman prove that they love each other.



They do not risk before marriage the whole future of their married life by playing around with love, caricaturing love, dissipating their emotions, growing cheap and common and vulgar in their display of easy affection.

Men and women who love their own future keep their love sound and wholesome and sacred for the time when it will play its part in God's plan for the human race.

Perhaps, they reason, God will give them the glorious vocation—as priests or religious—to love Him alone.

But if marriage is their happy destiny, they mean to bring to it clean emotions, strong unspoiled affections, an untarnished love. They will expect no less from their partner who with them will make their entire future life and give to God His glorious and immortal sons and daughters.

*How soon do you think a young couple should start to "go steady"?*

Oh I'd say about three to six months before they expect to marry.

Youth is the time during which God and nature meant us to make our friends, lots of friends. God did not mean that we should at that time tie ourselves down exclusively to one companion.

Youth is the period when we have to learn how to get along with people, lots of people and lots of kinds of people. Hence the mistake of adjusting oneself and one's mind and plans to the monotonous association with one person.

During his youth the person who has a wise eye on his own future grows in every possible way. He learns to talk to a great variety of people, to make himself agreeable to different temperaments. He learns even how to dance with those whose steps differ from his own, to play cards or to take part in sports with those who, because they are different, can help him to be many-sided.

The young boy and girl who settle down to "go steady" with each other will discover only in the future what a crimp they have put in their natural development.

They learn to talk only to one person. They dance well only with one person. They need not talk at all if they so

choose. They get none of that many-faceted development which comes from contact with various dispositions and backgrounds.

And worse: The boy becomes lazy. He does not need to be clever or amusing or socially on his toes to please the girl he has collared. She belongs to him, doesn't she? and she can take what he hands out. The girl comes to be demanding, jealous, insistent on her exclusive rights. They drift along together at a time of life when they should be learning socially how to run.

And what of the dangers involved in "going steady" too early? The two are thrown constantly together, almost as if they were soon to be married. Passion and emotion may grow between them with constantly developing peril and temptation. Or the opposite may happen: They may grow emotionally listless toward each other—the most awful possible prelude to marriage.

The high-school boys and girls who "go steady" deserve our unstinted pity. Seldom do they marry the youngsters with whom they "go steady." Often they grow bored with one another, and yet they don't know how to break the bonds that bind them in boredom.

Anyway what's the rush about "going steady"? From the day they marry they will "go steady" for the rest of their lives. Why shouldn't they use the period of their freedom and liberty to be free? Why should they bind themselves with responsibilities while they are in their teens?

Happy the young man and woman who keep a wide acquaintanceship. Happy those young people who preserve their liberty. The young man does not sulk when the girl is nice to another boy. The girl does not claw when the boy sees and is attracted by another girl. They are giving themselves a chance to develop naturally at a time when God and nature meant them to be foot-loose and fancy-free. They can improve their social gifts and learn the all-important art of dealing with a wide range of people.

Sheer laziness and an unwillingness to act their age make young people fall into the slovenly way of "going steady" when there is no remote possibility of their marrying.

Don't let any girl or boy clamp a "Reserved! Hands Off!" sign on you. Time enough to "go steady" when the young man has placed on the finger of the girl the ring of their solemn engagement, or when the young man has said for all the years ahead a choked but sincere "I do."

### *Do mixed marriages ever work out?*

The best-informed priest I ever knew on the subject said—after a lifetime concerned largely with trying to salvage wrecked marriages—that the chances against reasonable success in a mixed marriage today were about fifty to one.

All the odds were, he believed, stacked against such a marriage. He had become convinced that it was too big a risk. No gambler could take it.

Another priest, who is by no means an extremist or a man given to vague and nebulous alarms, said that he believed that the day would come when the Catholic Church would forbid all mixed marriages, would simply never give a dispensation for a mixed marriage.

Better by far, he argued, that some couples suffer from marriage being denied them than that so many couples be plunged into marriages that are doomed to be failures.

I repeat my own advice, from my own priestly experience with problems of mixed marriages: If you are thinking about marrying a non-Catholic, make a sincere Catholic out of him or her before you marry; you thereby increase beyond measure your chances of success in married life. Otherwise I fear for you.

### *What do you think of drinking?*

God made the vine and the fruit of the vine. As He sat with His disciples, He drank with dignity and deep friendliness from the unconsecrated cup upon the table. The discomfort of a young bride in Cana led Him by His first miracle to turn water into wine for her feast.

St. Paul advised the use of a "little wine for thy stomach's sake."

It is worth noting however that the Apostle advised a *little* wine and that he took it for granted that his old friend

and disciple, to whom he was writing, had reached the years when he was likely to be having stomach complaints.

Few people have been hurt by what they drank in the protective wholesomeness of their own homes. There have been however exceptions even here. But when parents serve wine on festive occasions, their children drink with relative safety. If to commemorate a birthday dad shakes some cocktails and gives a small one to the children, no harm is done.

Then as a person grows older and his powers grow weaker, a little stimulant may serve to make him slightly less boresome, less dull. Old people are likely to find the party a bit tiresome and to doze by the hearth unless they have the artificial stimulation of a drink or two. Besides there are parties so dull and conversations so wearisome that only the false glitter of a cocktail shaker keeps the miscalled celebrants from screaming in pain or staggering off in a drugged coma.

So drink can have its place.

In measure it can be an added joy to a family party or to a pleasant gathering in a home. It keeps old people from remembering for a brief time that they are old. When a tired businessman faces a social ordeal which he just isn't up to, he may find the strain less rending if he is fortified by a cocktail.

A mature person with a book and a glass of wine near his own fireside or in the companionship of congenial friends is a social symbol of relaxation and restfulness. Socially acceptable is the group of men sitting around beer steins, singing far more than drinking, loving the good fellowship much more than the mild beverage.

But drink was intended to be a stimulant for conversation, not a substitute. It was meant to be an aid to a party, not the party itself. Like all of God's good gifts, it was to be used with dignity and self-mastery by mature men and women. Men and women were not supposed to find it a trap for their feet, a stutter for their tongues, a cloud for their brains, a snare for their souls.

Time was when men were proud of their ability to "hold their drink." They would have been bitterly ashamed

of themselves if they found out the next day that they had on the strength of a couple of mugs or glasses made fools of themselves, passed out of the picture, or slid under the table in a lump.

But a new tradition marks our age. Young people are positively proud of the fact that liquor makes fools of them, that they can't "hold their drink." They brag about how drunk they were and the speed with which the liquor threw them.

"Oh boy, was I ever pie-eyed last night! I can't remember anything that happened after ten o'clock."

"Ohmigosh, what a head I've got this morning! I was boiled as an owl last night."

"After that second highball, honest I can't remember a thing."

"Powerful stuff. A couple of snifters, and I was out like a light."

What is there about drunkenness for anything other than shame? Physically the drunkards were weaklings. Morally they behaved like fools.

As a matter of cold fact young people have no more need for liquor than they have for crutches. They have their own innate vitality to furnish the power for a good time. When a crowd of them are together, song should be easy, jokes should fly fast, their feet should fairly itch to dance. They're not a lot of old codgers needing an alcoholic build-up. Their digestions are not so dulled or their minds so jaded that they must be stimulated before they come alive. They have simply none of the excuses which make drink understandable in those very elders whom youth regards with patronizing pity.

Quite willingly I concede that drink within their own homes is for young people seldom a peril. The same thing is true of drink in the well-conducted homes of their family's friends.

But for young people to drink elsewhere is something quite different. There is something particularly sinister about a "snort out of a flask" in a parked car; the ancient excuse of prohibition no longer makes that understandable. Most of the places that sell drink look as dismal, dark, and

dank as the mouth of hell. The people who frequent them seem in large measure to belong right with the bats and other lower forms of life.

Why can't drink be associated with family feasts? Right now it is linked with water-front brawls, obscene laughter, animal pawing, taverns that are the old saloons with new names and the old fixtures, sick stomachs, bad breaths, and fiery headaches.

That young man or woman is extremely smart who takes the pledge until he or she is twenty-one years old. An excellent reason for the taking of that pledge is to atone for the sins committed today by young people under the influence of drink and to prove by their strength that young people can get along nicely without drink. There is something splendid in the examples of the young man and woman who simply do not drink. They are willing to forego legitimate pleasure for the sake of the good example they give to others.

Young people are wise if they always realize that drink for most young people is inflammatory. From the dawn of seduction evil men have known that drink lowers a girl's resistance and increases their own passions. Get a girl to drink, they felt, and the gates of her virtue were at least unbarred, if not open.

So if young people are tempted, as by nature's arrangement they are during the days of youth, they are wise to put aside the added temptations resulting from drink. It is an easy way to solve some of their most severe problems.

When they reach maturity, they should learn to use drink wisely—if they think they need or want to drink. It can be an aid to social life, a stimulous to high converse, a pleasant lubricant for song, a bond of friendship. But to drink just to be drinking, to have a cocktail party just to drown the tonsils in alcohol, to use drink to lower one's modesty and decent inhibitions or to make evil seem amusing—these are indecent, inhuman, and unchristian.

It's a wise rule always to see that drink has a companion.

Drink with good food is urbane. Drink with good talk may be excellent. Drink with a beloved book may be good.

Drinking alone is dangerous. Drinking with strangers is an affront to friendship.

But always as a Catholic looks upon a glass filled with an alcoholic drink, he should hear the cry of Christ, "I thirst." He may then put aside the glass in order to suffer or sacrifice a little with the thirsting Christ. He will then certainly not add to the torture that men's drunkenness has caused the dying Christ.

No Catholic can escape the misery that has come to the world through the abuse of drink. He can then be a source of strength to tempted souls. If need be, he will bravely abstain throughout a lifetime if by his abstaining he can help his weaker brothers and sisters to overcome their temptations and break away from the slavery of drink.

*How can you always do the right thing and yet not seem to be a prude?*

A prude suggests, by the very sound of the word, a person with his lips puckered in disapproval. He or she, we may be sure, looks at the world from down a long, slightly blue nose. A holier-than-thou look in his eyes makes the rest of mankind cringe. He isn't necessarily good, but he is aggressively critical of the evil he finds in others.

On the other hand a really good person is a most charming one to know. Often he is marked by a strong instinct to mind his own business. He lives happily with God and his own soul; he wishes that everyone knew the joy and strength of virtue. But he does not go around tapping people on the shoulder and asking, like a voice from the tomb, "Brother, are you saved?"

He prays for sinners, but he smiles at them in friendliness.

He never stretches out a finger to point accusingly, but he is more than willing to reach out a hand to help.

He never raises his voice to scold. When he has a suggestion to make, his voice is gentle and kind and tempered with affection.

A saint is a delightful person. A prude is a "pain in the neck."

So you can always be good and yet have people like you if you go about it in the right way. You can be holy as a saint and still cheerful as a seraph. You can keep the Ten Commandments and perhaps keep them better if you keep your sense of humor.

In a phrase make it your life's rule not to go around condemning vice but to go about making virtue delightful and attractive.

The plain fact is that people vastly admire a good man or woman. They recognize instinctively and from their own bitter experience the high courage needed to be consistently good. And they admire virtue because virtue is essentially admirable.

Somewhere girls got the crazy idea that to be popular you have to be fast and loose. Nothing of the sort. The most genuinely popular girls are often those who grant no favors carelessly and who demand a high respect from the men they honor—and honor is the word—with their company.

The young man who can always say, "Thanks; no; I don't drink," is not pressed or harassed. It's the fellow who takes a drink today and not the next day that bothers people with his apparent inconsistency. If his friends know he doesn't drink, he can take his ginger ale in peace. If he is known to be absolutely abstemious, he may be very welcome in a group that drinks. He is perhaps the one who sees the others safely home.

Make virtue attractive, and make yourself attractive along with it.

Good people have a sort of obligation to be smart, attractive, clever, if possible well dressed. It's a shameful treason to leave these naturally prepossessing qualities to the evil of the world, so that in the worldling's mind goodness becomes associated with dullness. It is virtue that is attractive. Vice needs all the artificial adornments possible to hide its ugly, slovenly, stupid, shameful form.

Naturally people do not like a prude with pursed lips, a knitted brow, and a voice just about to croak, "Stop that this minute!" That person is caricaturing virtue and making goodness despicable.



But one can be good with a smile, say no with a cheerful shake of the head, sing clearly and happily a clean and melodic song, and dance with feet that never lose their right to tread the way to the communion rail.

Saints, canonized and far from the altar, always have something of the eternal winsomeness of Christ and Mary.

### *Why does the Church bless only the woman at the nuptial Mass?*

By the way, did you ever read that blessing? It is one of the most beautiful pieces of rhythmic prose that you are likely to meet in a long literary career.

Now to answer the question.

At the wedding ceremony, the actual marriage, the Church blesses both the husband and the wife. The ceremony is for both. The blessing is for both. The sacrament, which is the ultimate in blessings, is conferred on both.

Then during the Mass the Church pauses. In our form and according to our custom both the bride and the groom come forward. But it is over the head of the bride that the priest prays. If you will read the blessing, you will understand why it is for her.

The Church looks to the woman hopefully. She is the fountain of life. Upon her goodness and purity, her fair fruitfulness depend that precious future of the human race. Oh yes; the part of man is essential and beautiful too. But with a sort of wistful tenderness Mother Church stands over this future mother and prays upon her all the blessings that will mean peace in the home, happiness for her and her husband, strong children, long life in the land.

It is a kind of special tribute that the Church pays to virginity as it stands in the moment of transition on the way to wifeliness. It is the high hope with which the Church regards the mothers of the race.

Men and women unite in the production of human life.

But it is woman's body that must tabernacle life and the woman's arms that must cradle it. The Church seems to recognize all this when it pours out its spiritually poetic blessing upon the bride.

## *How can you handle a situation when things grow rough and evil and dangerous?*

The best way to handle any situation is not to let it arise.

Let's say the young couple are going out for the evening. They have nothing planned. They are just going to wander around. She has thought of nothing interesting or amusing to talk about. He is merely drifting.

It is almost inevitable that trouble will come. Because they have nothing amusing or interesting to do, they will probably stumble upon something vulgar or evil. Because she has planned no pleasant subject for their talk, they may wander off into the gutters and alleys of speech.

But let's say that he has planned a delightful and entertaining evening. Fine! Trouble is not likely in such a case. She has trained herself to talk well and to listen better. Excellent! Their conversation will not veer toward the garbage heaps.

Now that same rule is true of all social life. If one has a party and provides, let's say, cocktails and nothing else, the something else brought up by the party itself will probably be trouble. On the other hand when any program, however informal, has been set for the evening, no one has a chance to get into mischief. The party is not derailed.

But let's say that trouble does start. What then?

A real social leader, one sure of himself or herself, can soon deflect it.

The first blue story has been told. He or she cuts in with a really amusing and decent story. The third person may hesitate to throw the conversation back into the dirt.

The party grows rough. The leader has a delightful or amusing game that is decent as well as entertaining. He takes over and swings the party his way.

Often music is the easiest way to deflect dirt. Lucky the person who from a piano bench has learned to dominate the course of an evening's fun. Smart the hostess who has a good gramophone with a supply of records that make possible dancing and entertainment.

The last way in the world to stop evil may be a threatening frown, an air of austere disapproval, a how-dare-you-sir

attitude that tends to provoke the evil to further essays into dirt and destruction. The skilled social person learns to ignore a dirty joke as he would cover over the caterpillar that the cook carelessly left in the salad. He can swing a group from dull dirt to amusing, clean fun. He has a substitute ready to offer, whether it be a song, a joke, a game, a stunt, a clever remark.

But all this takes practice, and that requires thinking and planning.

Unfortunately too many good people only *wish* they could control evil; they aren't willing enough to do the thinking, the planning, and the work necessary for leadership in any line.

### ***Do you think that in time the Church will sanction birth control?***

What this question seems to be saying is: Artificial birth control is wrong merely because the Church today says it's wrong.

The Church did not write the law against birth control. It is a natural law, and it comes from the God of nature. Nothing can ever change that law.

Artificial birth control is wrong for any number of reasons:

God Himself in the Old Law branded it as vile.

God forbade it because it was wrong in itself, with a wrongness that nothing can alter. God gave men and women a tremendous power, the power of creation. With this power He connected the pleasures of love. Love was a reward for the difficult work of bearing and rearing children. To use then this power of creation merely for the pleasure involved and at the same time to thwart conception is a terrible evil. It distorts one of the most essential natural functions, a function upon which depends the future of the human race. And this distortion is brought about merely for one's own selfish pleasure.

Besides this we have learned from bitter experience the sad consequences of artificial birth control:

It saps the future of the race.

It cuts off mankind at its very fountain and source.

It makes the birth rate drop so rapidly that nations slip down the scale of strength and run the chance of eventually eliminating themselves.

It takes from sins of impurity the restraining fear of consequence.

It destroys happiness in marriage by reducing the woman to the level of a mere companion in passion. Divorce on a wholesale scale has been one terrible result of birth control.

It sometimes harms the nervous and physical system.

For all these reasons and for many others the Church insists that men and women must remember the basic law of God and nature.

But by insisting on this, the Church is defending the human race, safeguarding human life, protecting the home, and keeping women above the level of prostitutes.

If the future is to be safe, we can thank the Catholic Church for fighting the battle of God's law against those who love pleasure and the easy roads of shirked duty.

***Doesn't the Church make a mistake when it insists that parents have children even in poverty?***

That's another mistaken idea.

The Church does not insist that parents have children.

It does not insist on young people's marrying. It does not oblige parents to have children.

A married couple may certainly live in continence if they wish and if they so agree. They may for grave and sufficient reasons practice for a time the systematic restraint of the Rhythm Theory.

But the whole argument from poverty is a mistaken one. If it were a true reason, then the opposite would also be true: Birth controllers would be urging the rich to have as many children as possible. Clearly it is the rich rather than the poor who are notably childless.

If poverty is an evil, then it is poverty that should be eliminated, not human life. If the advocates of birth control were working as hard to eliminate poverty as they are to eliminate human beings, we might have a world of justice and right distribution. But they are taking the easy road of eliminating people. We prefer to eliminate poverty.

You cannot do evil in order that good may come out of it.

You cannot eliminate the human race in order to insure that the human race won't be poor.

### *Why do modern parents avoid teaching their children about sex?*

Sometimes because the parents are shy. Sometimes because they don't know how to teach it. Sometimes because they think their children will be shocked. Sometimes because they hope that this instruction will be given by the priests and the religious.

It is doubtful whether God and nature ever intended formal sex instructions to be given children, even by parents. Sex was one of those human, natural things which one learned in the atmosphere of the home.

In most Catholic countries children learn to regard sex in that way—as wholesome, natural, related to marriage and children, and to be kept free from sin.

But Puritanism established the tradition that sex is essentially evil. Jansenism and Calvinism seemed to regard human nature itself as evil, corrupt, shameful. So people became furtive, shy, reticent about sex. They cloaked the whole matter in shame and secrecy.

Catholic parents had better reconstruct their attitude and help their children to a sane, wholesome knowledge of sex.

The pure, clean, natural atmosphere of the home is essential.

Parents would be wise to get a good Catholic book on how to give sex instructions.

Innocence is not ignorance. Priests and religious are at best only substitutes for the parents, who are really the ones who should give their children the instruction and guidance.

We need young people who value purity, who know why it is precious and beautiful, and who have become aware of their own dignity as potential procreators—with God—of the future of the human race.

### *How can I know whether I have a religious vocation?*

There are a great many more people called by God to priestly and religious life than have the courage to accept the call.

Sometimes they don't give themselves a chance to hear the call. Sometimes they regard a vocation as something amazing, startling, thunderstriking. And all the time if they have a religious or a priestly call, it is the greatest good luck of their lives. The signs of a vocation are clearly before the eyes of anyone who cares to see them.

Here then are the signs, briefly sketched.

First the person must have the necessary qualifications. This means health sufficient for the religious life. It implies enough education to do the work demanded by the particular order. The person must be free from habits of sin. If in the past the person had such a habit but has overcome it, that past habit need not be an essential bar. It is wise however to talk this over with one's confessor.

Very importantly it is not necessary to be outstandingly virtuous or to find piety or prayer easy and simple. Novitiates and seminaries are established as places where young religious can learn the way of the spiritual life. They will study virtue, prayer, and piety there.

The normal qualifications needed today for religious life are those of any good, wholesome young man or woman who enjoys life and has a body made healthy by clean living and wholesome sports and recreation, a mind trained to decent thinking and a fair grasp of truth and the ability to get along with people. Naturally the higher the qualifications of mind and body and heart, the finer the material they bring with them to the religious life.

Second the future priest or religious should have a supernatural motive for wanting to become a priest or a religious.

It is not of course sufficient motive to want to rush into seminaries and novitiates in order to be sure of meals, of a

roof over one's head, of an education, of intellectual life, and of pleasant companionship.

Yet a person may have what may seem a low motive—the fear of hell, let's say—and be said to have a supernatural reason. Many a young man or woman took the first step toward high sanctity when he or she ran into the arms of God through sheer fear of losing his or her soul. Other supernatural motives are higher in the scale of dignity: the desire to be sure of heaven and eternal salvation, the fear of offending God amid the temptations of the world, an impulse to work for the salvation of others, the desire to become like the saints in love of neighbor and closeness to God, a longing for the companionship of Christ, a pure and unselfish love of God.

The third thing necessary is the aspirant's acceptance by a religious community or, in the case of the priesthood, by a bishop.

In the amazingly rich providence of God there has grown up in the Church the widest variety of priestly and religious work. There are communities suited to almost every type of taste and talent. The many ingenious schemes for religious perfection are remarkably varied.

Yet as a rule a person thinks of religious life because of pleasant association with some definite men or women religious, or of a priestly life because of admiration for some priest. This in itself may be an indication that one would fit well into the kind of life led by the person admired and respected. It is common sense then that the first thought be given to that community.

With all the seriousness in the world I beg of you to think seriously of priestly and religious life. Anyone who has even a slight inclination toward such a life is cheating himself miserably if he doesn't give the impulse the fullest possible consideration. There is no other life comparable to religious or priestly life in the happiness offered or the useful work made possible. No cowardice, no difficulties, no diffidence about oneself, no shrewd considerations for the future should be allowed to stand in the way of so glorious an opportunity.

Fortunate indeed is the soul who hears, however faintly, the call of Christ. Happy the soul who feels the impulse to enter into such happy association with the Virgin Mother.

Sometimes it takes more courage to accept than one naturally possesses. Often one treads to this high life a road that is like martyrdom. Within the priestly or religious life there will be hard and laborious living, days dominated by rule, the need to develop high virtue and strong self-mastery. But I have often told young people that really the hardest part of religious life is the step by which one enters it. From that point on Christ, given half a chance, takes over. He works day and night with the cooperative and generous soul.

There is no other life comparable to that spent in happy companionship with the Savior, in work for the kingdom of God on earth, in companionship with men and women dedicated to the love of Christ, in constant opportunity for personal worth, Christlike living, godlike achievement.

*Have you any advice to give people who want to discover or be sure of their vocation?*

Yes indeed.

First they get a regular confessor and go to him about once every two weeks. They tell him that they have thought of the priestly or religious life and that they need help and guidance. They explain that they mean to come back and that they hope the priest will help them make up their minds.

Then they go to communion as often as they can and pray constantly to God to give them wisdom and courage.

They continue their regular work and life, whatever it may be, but make a definite effort to do this work as well as possible. If they have a job, they give it their best abilities. If they are studying, they work earnestly.

They keep up a pleasant and wholesome social life. This is important, for future priests and religious seldom are destined for hermitages or anchorholds.

Each night and morning at prayer they remind God of their uncertainty and ask for guidance.

In an amazingly short time they know exactly what God wants.



Then they may need further counsel from their priest director and help from God to get the courage to follow God's splendid invitation.

*When would you advise a young man to enter the religious life or the seminary?*

No one can possibly give a blanket answer to that question. Too many factors enter in.

The person who should make the decision for the individual is that confessor to whom he has talked and in whom he has confidence.

These days a young man is usually ripe for the novitiate when he has completed high school—and a little more. The same is usually true of preparation for the major seminary.

A young man with a strong vocation that is under the watchful eye of a good confessor may finish college before he enters the seminary. Often this gives him an experience and maturity which are reflected in a richer, more effective later life. If however the young man feels that for any of a thousand reasons his vocation is slipping, he should honestly tell his confessor and act on the confessor's advice.

The voice of the spiritual director is likely to be the voice of God in the selection of the right time.

*When do you think a girl should enter the convent?*

Here again the girl should settle this question with her regular confessor or spiritual director.

It may well be that the maturity we hope for in young religious will not be gained by the girl until she has completed a full high-school course. We are thinking of course of the time element, not of the educational question. In addition many a nun is glad that she finished college and entered religious life with her degree in her hand.

But this is largely a matter of the individual girl. All the education a girl can take with her into religious life is immensely valuable.

Yet if she feels that she is risking her vocation if she stays out and finishes her college education, she should talk

this matter over with her confessor. He will probably advise her to enter promptly.

In the case of either a boy or a girl however it is often risking a vocation to stay out in the world for a few years just to earn some money. Literally thousands of vocations are lost in this way. The independence that comes with the earning of money, the new associations of the business world, the formation of connections that are not easy to break make later entrance difficult, often impossible.

The ultimate general answer can be only this: Enter when God wants you and circumstances are such that your confessor says, "Now is the time."

*My mother and father do not want me to become a religious. What shall I do?*

*(This same question is often asked by young men who are thinking of the priesthood.)*

When a mother and a father depend for the actual essentials of life upon the financial help of a son or a daughter, no religious order would think of accepting him or her. Such children have a duty to their parents, and they must put aside, however reluctantly, the desire for vocation and fulfill their obligation. But there must be a real financial need, not merely the desire of parents to live more spaciouly or actually to retire upon the earnings of their children.

We must always remember that each generation lives for the generation that follows. It is unfair and unjust for parents to thwart out of selfishness the rightful development of their children.

So if parents object to their children's vocations for any of a thousand specious, silly, capricious, and selfish reasons, they are going far outside their rights. The children should talk the matter over with their confessor and follow his advice.

There is something tragic about those parents who get between their children and God. For that matter with the years one grows to marvel at the temerity of parents who get between their children and any of the children's decent ambitions or right development. How people dare to play

God and decide what they think the future of their children should be is a little difficult to understand.

The parents die; and the children live on, often with lives twisted and warped by parental selfishness. Parents force their children into work for which they are not suited. They jockey them into marriages or keep them from marriages on the basis of their own whims. They push them into ways of life that they walk only with pain and stumbling.

Of course parents have every possible right to advise and suggest. They are obliged to provide all the education they can decently afford for their children and give them the fine Catholic home which is their right.

• But when children are settling their future careers, and when God enters with His highly flattering call, any father and mother with faith and a regard for God's rights will bow to His will.

Lucky the parents who are honored with a son called to the priesthood or a son or a daughter invited to the religious life. Their own reward from God is assured and great. Stupid and un-Catholic are the parents who block through selfishness or the lack of spiritual vision the way that opens for their son or daughter to altar or cloister.

They will live to regret their greed or stupidity in the unhappiness of their children and their own loss of God's blessings.

God and the future will be generous only to those parents who deal generously with their children and with Him. And parental happiness and merit are high indeed when parents give their son or daughter to the service of God and the salvation of immortal souls.

*Why do you talk constantly either of marriage or of the priestly and religious life? Isn't there a third state, virginity in the world? Can't I rightly desire and ambition it?*

Yes; virginity in the world is a third state in life.

Many a saintly man and woman live and have during the course of history lived in that state. Many of them are doing heroic things for others. There is for instance the generous

aunt who lives and works and plans for the children who are not her own. There is the fine young son who never marries so that he can take care of his parents in their old age. There is the person who devotes himself to some special career which can be handled more effectively by an unmarried person.

God will certainly bless those who lead what are undoubtedly heroic lives.

The fact is that this kind of life is so heroic that a person is not as a rule wise deliberately to plan for and choose it. Without the most expert spiritual advice it is unwise to decide, "It is my vocation to remain a virgin in the world, without marriage, without religious life." For it is a life that demands high heroism.

Around it are none of the greater protections and few of the consolations of virginity in the sanctuary or in the cloister. Life in this career almost surely grows more lonely with the years. Seldom enough do those who profit most by the unselfishness of these generous people show a warming gratitude and a compensating love. The old people that are cared for by such unmarried men and women in the world are full of complaints. The young people reared by these selfless men and women respond with thoughtless ingratitude, if not with sheer selfishness.

Normally God asks people to marry or to enter His service directly. The third vocation is often forced upon people, who can then become great saints by accepting their careers generously and laboriously. But they are not wise to set their faces toward this life out of any reasons other than those forced upon them by God or sanctioned by a wise director.

Certainly bachelorhood merely for the sake of more spending money and greater freedom from responsibility is no noble career.

*Why are priests and sisters so remote from us? Why don't they associate more closely with us who live in the world? Priests and nuns should be utterly other-worldly. Why are some of them so much interested*

*in the things that belong more properly to us who live in the world?*

I place both the questions at the same time because they make clear the old cynical statement: "Damned if you do; damned if you don't." I can't say that the questions are very frequent in my experience. A questioning look however, a glance that says either, "Why don't you?" or "Why do you?" is not so infrequent.

We withdraw from the world and from the things that are of the world in order to give ourselves solely to the things that mattered to Christ. We want to belong to God. We want to be about our Father's business.

We return to the world because we are not solitaries in the desert or contemplatives. We must seek souls where souls are to be found. We must look for the lost sheep where it is likely that the sheep are lost. And those places are not cloistered or usually redolent of incense.

So it would seem that, however you look at it, we religious and priests have a somewhat difficult time pleasing the public. (May I with all deference and with no intention towards ambitious comparisons say that Christ here had a hard time too?) If we abstain too much from human society, if we love our sanctuaries and cloisters too much, we are subject to criticism. If we seem not to love people enough, we are subject to criticism. If we are unworldly, we run the chance of being regarded as a little odd. If we seem slightly worldly, we run the battery of raised eyebrows.

The fact is that we are set aside, and we are different, and we cannot and would not deny it. We are consecrated to God. We belong to an army whose headquarters are in another world, and we are involved with interests that are, like the interests of Christ, not of this world. We cannot be exactly as others are.

Yet we must live in the world; we must work for the world; we must speak the language of the world—to some extent; we must know the problems of today, and have our hands scratched by the briars (if the sheep are entangled), and splash our habits and cassocks with mud (if the sinner has fallen into the gutter).

Forgive us if, since we are human beings — however strong in us the grace of God—we sometimes love the peace of our holy houses. Forgive us if in a zeal that is not always supremely wise we have to follow the sinner in ways that are dark and along paths that for the time seem not to be leading upward.

*What shall I say or do when people tell me that Catholics are narrow-minded?*

Perhaps you're just as smart if you smile and admit that they probably are narrow-minded.

Everyone who really believes in something important is likely to be narrow-minded about it. Mathematicians are unblinkingly narrow-minded about the multiplication tables. Doctors are not one bit broad-minded about quacks and the witch doctors of the African jungles. Bankers are not at all broad-minded about thieves, forgers, and counterfeiters.

Catholics are as a rule kind and gentle in their dealings with non-Catholics. It took the Catholics of Eire to elect a Protestant to the presidency of Ireland at the very time that the Protestants of Ulster were yelling loudest, "To hell with the Pope!" We Catholics do not believe that anything is to be gained by our forcing our religion on anyone. We do not think that you can beat and dragoon people into believing in and loving Jesus Christ.

But when someone suggests to us that Protestantism, which is only part of Christ's teachings, is as good as Catholicity, which is the entire sum of His principles and practice, he can hardly expect us to be broad-minded, in smiling agreement.

We do not think it liberal or bright to trade Christ's seven sacraments for three sacraments, or two, or one. We do not intend to swap the rock of Peter for the uncounted sands of the disunited churches. We do not consider it a good business to barter the infallibility of Christ's representative for the infallibility of every man who picks up a Bible or propounds a personal religion full of contradictions and historic naiveté.

If this is narrow-mindedness, then we Catholics are confessedly narrow-minded. And it's a very reassuring state of

mind in which to be. Christ loved all men. But He was so narrow-minded about truth that He died rather than relinquish it. And when disciples left Him because he wouldn't whittle down His truth, He watched them go and made no gesture to recall them.

*When asked by a non-Catholic why you believe that your religion is the only true religion, can you answer him in a few words?*

A few words is a small wrapping for the vastness of Catholic truth.

Try this however for a partial answer:

I believe in the Catholic Church because it is the only Church that goes back to Christ and the Apostles. All other churches began later, at a date in most cases clearly marked in history, too late to connect them with the founders of Christ's Church.

I believe in the Catholic Church just because it is Catholic. The Greek word *Catholicos* means complete. The Catholic Church teaches completely everything that Christ taught, does all that Christ commanded, and reaches out to draw "every creature" into the "one fold," of which He is the shepherd.

I believe in the Catholic Church because all that it teaches is wonderfully beautiful and consoling. Its truths are exactly what the human heart has wanted to know. It gives its members intellectual security and deep happiness.

I believe in the Catholic Church because never once in the course of its history has it made a doctrinal mistake. Teaching openly for almost twenty centuries, it has never been forced to go back on its teachings and confess, "Now that time I was wrong; what I taught has turned out to be wrong, and I take it back." There is no other institution in all history that holds that position.

I believe in the Catholic Church because, while other religions rise, change, fade, disappear, it goes its serene, unchanging way.

I believe in the Catholic Church because it alone is the mother of saints.

I believe in the Catholic Church because it is and has been hated by all the "right" people.

I believe in the Catholic Church because it is the Mystical Body of Christ speaking His words, repeating His acts, loving what He loved, hating what He hated, carrying out His commands until the end of the world.

But after you have said all this, you will need to do a lot of amplifying and illustrating. Of course an educated Catholic should be prepared to do that too.

***May a Catholic go to a Protestant church if he goes to his own church too?***

No. Christ established one Church, His Church. He did not establish churches. Certainly He didn't start those churches which began centuries after He laid the foundations of His Church on Peter the rock. Surely He cannot be accused of teaching the contradictory things taught by the dissonant and disagreeing Protestant sects.

Christ established one way in which God was to be honored. We do not honor God when we worship Him in a way He does not recognize as His Son's.

So there is one and only one true Church.

Christ commanded everyone to hear that Church. He prayed that all would enter that Church so that there would be "one fold and one shepherd." He asked that we might all "be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee." He did not want the Christian world divided into innumerable divergent religions, each going its own human and hesitant way.

For a Catholic to go to any other church but the Catholic Church is first of all a waste of time. If what this other church teaches is true, it got that truth from the Catholic Church. If what it teaches is not taught in the Catholic Church, it is not true.

For a Catholic to go to any other church is to thwart the commands of Christ. When we do this, we help divide Christ's flock into separate sheepfolds. We cut up the Mystical Body into warring parts. We split the Church into discordant churches. Surely God does not want this.



The Catholic Church teaches all that Christ taught, does all that He commanded, believes all that He gave us to believe, preserves all His commandments, and carries on His worship of His Father. For a Catholic to go to any other church is to act as if Christ's Church were not sufficient and His plans for our salvation not enough.

*May we go to non-Catholic churches for weddings and funerals?*

Yes—except in those dioceses in which such attendance is forbidden.

Also we may not go if we know that our attendance would cause scandal to people seeing a Catholic in a non-Catholic church.

But as a rule attendance at a non-Catholic funeral is merely an act of friendship, and attendance at a non-Catholic wedding is the taking part in a social function. What is forbidden to Catholics is their participation in a false or inadequate or incomplete or humanly-instituted worship of God. We may attend a non-Catholic funeral to sympathize with our friends and honor the dead; we may attend a non-Catholic wedding to rejoice with them.

*What about the Catholic churches which feature bingo and games of chance that amount to gambling?*

In some dioceses all these are explicitly forbidden.

In many cases such activities cause grave scandal to others, especially when these games are forbidden by city law.

But sometimes we can wonder just how justified is the scandal taken.

The whole question of gambling really is involved, and gambling is not necessarily always wrong.

Naturally enough it is wrong to gamble money that one cannot afford to lose, or to risk money that is needed for the care of one's family.

Crooked gambling is wrong, not because it is gambling, but because it is crooked.

But where one can afford some slight risk, where one is not doing harm to others, where the stakes and the play are really part of one's recreation and social life, gambling is not of its very nature evil.

On a certain occasion when a Protestant minister denounced gambling in all forms, he was asked if he believed in the Bible. He replied that of course he did. Then he was asked where in the Bible all gambling was forbidden. Apparently he is still looking for the place.

It would be wonderful however if all these slightly undignified and sometimes scandal-giving forms of money-collecting could be eliminated. That would be easily possible were Catholics as generous to their church as they should be. If those Catholics who complain of bingo increased their contributions to their church, bingo under church auspices might easily be foregone. And if people were as ready to put their money into the collection basket as they are to risk money on charity lotteries, there would be no financial problem in any Catholic church.

But perhaps that is a dreamworld, far from reality.

### *Why can't Catholics become Masons?*

Masonry is another religion—and a complete one, according to the Masons.

It has its rites of initiation and of burial, its creed, cult, and code. It worships God in a form entirely its own. It offers to its members a religion which many of them regard as complete enough to need no supplementing by another church.

Hence one can no more be a Catholic and a Mason than one can be a Catholic and a Jew, a Catholic and a Methodist.

In many European and Latin-American countries Masonry is frankly and violently anti-Catholic. Its war on the Church has been carried on at times quite openly, at times with clever secrecy.

In America such open hostility is not often the case. Catholics and individual Masons live in friendly relationship. Even here however Masonry has opposed the parochial schools. It regards itself as an international organization

that rightly takes precedence over the international Catholic Church.

There is something very sad about the Catholic who gives up his religion for the sake of business advantages he gains through Masonry. It shows an entirely false sense of values, a complete loss of faith in the eternal rewards of heaven.

***May a Catholic marry a non-Catholic who has been married to and divorced from another non-Catholic?***

There is only one answer that can be given to this question and to a thousand others like it that regard marriage: Take the entire case to your parish priest, and go over it thoroughly with him.

No one can possibly give an immediate decision on a question like the one stated here. Too many circumstances affect the validity of marriage. Too many conditions need to be explained and studied.

In general however a Catholic is wise to take it for granted that the marriage of non-Catholics is a valid one. The normal legislation of the Church so regards it. A Catholic is playing the fool if he becomes involved with a formerly married non-Catholic on the easy supposition that that first Protestant marriage will be put aside as no good. The bets are all in favor of the Church's finding the first marriage all right.

Most marriage legislation of the Church regards Catholics only. It prefers to think that non-Catholics are rightly married.

So each marriage would have to be studied in detail. Are there any elements present that might have affected its validity from the start? Force, fear, fraud may have entered in. Are the persons baptized Christians or pagans? Could the Pauline Privilege be applied? Was the marriage null and void from the start?

Only careful study will make these points clear. In the interval the marriage will be regarded by all priests as legal and binding. Too many Catholics gaily start out by questioning the marriage of some non-Catholic with whom they have fallen in love, only to find in the end that they are involved with a perfectly correctly married person.

So the wise policy with regard to all marriages would run like this:

1. They should be regarded as correct marriages until the facts have conclusively proved that they are not correct. It is ridiculous to build up false hopes on rumors, guesses, and legends about what the Church has done in other like cases.

2. The case should promptly be referred to some priest who has the time, patience, and knowledge to thresh through all the data.

3. In the interval the one who has presented the case should reconcile himself to the likelihood of a decision in favor of the former marriage. For one marriage found invalid, a hundred are recognized by the Church as valid, lawful, and entirely binding.

So a Catholic is very smart if he or she does not become involved emotionally with married people, whatever their faith or their lack of it. He or she may as well know that the Church will do all it can to establish the first marriage as firm and lawful. Only those marriages that are plainly and provably void from the start or that fall under one or two of the rare conditions will be set aside.

***I am going with a non-Catholic. I hope that I shall convert him. What do you think of that?***

By all means convert him—before you marry him.

If you wait for his conversion until after you are married to him, you probably will wait a long, long time.

If he does not love you enough now to study your religion and learn about the faith that is so important to you, he is not likely to bother much about it once you are safely his and he knows you cannot escape.

Of course you must not let him become a Catholic just to marry you. If that is his sole reason for conversion, he will not hold his faith long after marriage.

When love grows a little pale, the difficulties of being a Catholic are likely to mount and mount.

Convert him now, sincerely and honestly, by force of your good example and on the strength of what your religion

has done to make you a splendid person. Then you can marry him at a nuptial Mass before God's altar and start your life with a real union of hearts and minds.

There is no need to tell anyone who knows modern living that a mixed marriage has only an infinitesimally small chance of success these days.

The odds against happiness in mixed marriage are tremendous. They are not worth the risk of the most adventurous type of gambler.

*My father is a fine man. He is not a Catholic. I do not think I should disturb him by trying to make him become a Catholic.*

Any well-instructed Catholic knows that good non-Catholic men and women may belong to the invisible Church. If they do, through baptism and a sincere love of God they will be saved.

Yet it does seem strange that Catholics are not more anxious to share—certainly with those they love—the wonderful advantages that come with membership in the visible Church. How strange that Catholics don't worry more about their dear ones who are not Catholic. How selfish that they do not try to pass on to those dear ones outside the faith the graces and certainties of Christ's own Church.

Let's say that during the course of his life the non-Catholic has committed even one mortal sin. (After all most people do.) What does he do to get rid of it? Many non-Catholics have not the slightest idea of repentance or supernatural sorrow for sins. They have no confessional. They are not taught about the methods of reviving grace in their souls. Yet sin is not forgiven merely because in the course of time the sinners forget the sin. It is not forgiven merely because a person is a gentleman and embarrassed by the cheapness of his conduct.

So we may well worry about our non-Catholic relatives and friends as we wonder what they have done to remove sin from their souls.

Catholics know vividly their own need for strength. Again and again they have to call on the power of prayer.

They have felt the immediate help that comes from the sacraments. Yet even with all these aids life remains difficult enough and temptation strong and seductive. What do non-Catholics do, who must struggle along without these things? It seems more than a little selfish that we Catholics are positively reluctant to encourage these non-Catholics to our Christ-given sources of strength.

Only through union with Christ can a person possess that supernatural life which makes possible entrance into heaven. A person may be a gentleman and a fine, naturally good man and yet not possess within himself the life of God, which is grace. Yet if he dies without grace, his soul has no power to enjoy the beatific vision. Without the life of God in his soul he cannot do the godlike things necessary to see, know, love, and possess the Trinity.

Catholics are sometimes quite disconcerted to find out how little even good Protestants—and much more, good natural men—know about God . . . how little thinking they do about the next life . . . how vague they are about Christ . . . how little thought they give to the saving of their own souls.

More than likely the word disturb in this question is a wrong one.

Catholics don't disturb the non-Catholic by their offering him a share in the glorious faith of Christ. On the other hand they are often too lazy to bother with the labor of conversion. They know their own faith too slightly and superficially to be able to express it convincingly to anyone else.

It is selfish to hold back from our dear ones the joy of Christmas communion or the peace that follows a good confession. We are cheating them when we fail to let them know and love Our Lady. There is something very callous about the Catholics who let their relatives die without faith, without a sign of sorrow for past sins or any thought of the eternity that lies just beyond death.

Making converts is not easy. It demands of us a fine example. It takes time, patience, tact, and prayer.

Too many Catholics pretend to a gentlemanly or ladylike unwillingness to "disturb their relatives and friends," when what they really have is a low estimate of their own faith and a complete lack of zeal.

## *How can I make a convert of one of my own family?*

Sometimes this is harder than the converting of a friend or a total stranger. Yet it need not be so hard.

Many a non-Catholic within the bosom of a Catholic family is puzzled by the fact that he is never asked to share even a portion of the Catholic faith and practice. In fact he feels himself barred as an unwanted outsider.

A fine beginning for conversion is to ask this non-Catholic to some notable church event, the Christmas Mass, Holy Week services, a sermon by some outstanding priest, an attractive novena service.

Then quite frankly we can hand the non-Catholic a Catholic book. The attitude that accompanies the presenting of the book should not be an aggressive "Here, read this and become a Catholic" but "Here's a book that interested me, and I thought you might find it interesting too."

As a matter of course we can start inviting our non-Catholic relative to go to church with us. The less this is made an event and the more we make it a matter of pleasant, friendly association, the better.

"We are going to the novena tonight. Do come with us."

"Before we go to the movies, we're dropping in for benediction. How about coming along?"

"We'll be stopping off for Mass on our way to the picnic. We'd love to have you come too."

Catholics often act positively reluctant about sharing their religion. Many a Protestant and a non-Catholic find us cold and aloof. They feel that we really don't want to be bothered with them. We never invite them to our services. We leave them out of all things Catholic.

So they are often surprised and usually pleased when we invite them in a friendly way.

In some cases a frank statement of our own interest in their conversion is a good idea.

"You know we never want to bother you about becoming a Catholic. That would be something you'd have to decide entirely for yourself. But just the same you know how happy it would make us if you ever decided to join us in the faith."

A pleasant, cordial invitation of this sort makes a profound impression.

Beyond all else however the non-Catholics in the household are impressed by what they see their Catholic relatives do. If faith obviously influences their conduct, if they love the faith and its practices, if they never miss their essential duties, if they never shock the non-Catholic by sharp criticism of or complaint about the obligations of the faith, if they live their faith and enjoy it and get a lot of happiness and consolation out of it, this is the most powerful argument and persuasion.

But even then that personal invitation is important.

You may get a surprisingly pleasant response to it.

*If God knows what I am going to do, whether I shall be saved or lost, there is nothing that I can do about it. My fate is sealed. So why worry?*

Inevitably someone pops up with this question of predestination. It seems to be one of the commonest of difficulties.

Instead of answering the question directly, let's take an example or parallel.

We are watching the ski jumpers in the city park. A jumper comes to the top of the run, poises, and tips his skis downward. You and I are certain that the man is going to make the slide and the jump at the end of the run. He has not done so yet, but from his position and movements we are certain that he intends to do so. Indeed even before our thoughts take very definite form, he lets himself go, glides down the packed snow, and hurtles through the air in a magnificent leap.

Now read this over carefully and follow the line of thought:

We knew that the man was going to make the ski jump.

Actually he did what we knew he would do.

So we foresaw his actions, and he lived up to our forecast.



But here is the point: We knew he would make the ski jump, and we knew this *because he was going to make the jump.*

He did not make the ski jump *because we knew he would make it.*

In other words our foreknowledge in this case depended on what the man would do. He did not jump because we had foreknowledge of his jumping. We had foreknowledge of his jumping because he was going to jump.

God's foreknowledge of us can be paralleled in some way by this. Of course God's vision of the world is much more elaborate and hence will not fit into any human comparison. But with God everything is *now*. With Him there is no past, present, or future. Everything for Him simply *is*.

So looking into history and time, He sees you and me and all of us. He sees not merely what we have of our own free will done in the past; He sees what of our own free will we shall do in the future. He sees the things that we will decide to do. Later on we decide to do those things. He foresees because of our future decision. Our future decision was not caused by the fact that He foresees it.

So God, looking forward, sees that a year from now you and I will have the same temptation. He sees you freely resisting and me freely yielding. Looking into the future, as you and I did in the case of the man on the ski jump, He watches us make our decision. He foresees you freely deciding to resist, me freely deciding to sin. But we do not make our decision because God foresees it. He foresees it because we will make it.

Looking still further forward into our lives, God sees us deciding whether we want to go to heaven or to hell. The time comes, and we make our final decision. That decision is, with God's grace or in contempt of it, ours to make. But he foresees what we shall freely choose to do.

If right now you determine, and mean it, "I will end my life in heaven," God sees your decision and is wonderfully happy. If somewhere in the world someone is saying, "I mean to go to hell," God sees that too and regrets it.

But we do not make our decisions because God has foreseen them.

God foresees our decisions because we will make them.

All this may take a lot of thinking, but it grows clearer with deeper thought.

*How much faith should I have in prayer? Should I demand that God give me my way? Or should I put my prayer so vaguely that I leave it pretty much up to God?*

Our Blessed Lord Himself promised, "Ask, and it shall be given you."

Where prayer is concerned, we may start with the certainty that no prayer is ever wasted. If we pray with faith and sincerity and perseverance, our prayer will most certainly be answered. We have Christ's guarantee for that. God will give us what we ask. Or if His clear vision sees that what we ask is bad for us, He graciously gives us something else—and better.

So in all our prayers we must pray with that understanding. "I want this, God, provided you foresee that it would not be bad for me."

God Himself set us the lovely example of prayer made perfectly. As He faced His Passion in the vision of Gethsemani, human dread and fear shook Him to the depths of His soul. So He prayed with all His heart that the awful chalice held to His lips be withdrawn.

Immediately however He added the essential condition: "Yet not my will, but thine be done."

So we can ask from God, and ask generously.

We can put all our needs, spiritual and temporal, and even our half-formed desires before Him.

Always though for our own safety and to protect ourselves against a future which we cannot possibly foresee, we should put these requests in the subjunctive mood: "If they are good for me, dear Lord, let me have them."

Then God, looking forward to see what the consequences of His granting our requests would be, will grant our requests or withhold them, His actions depending on whether He sees them benefiting us or doing us harm.

If the thing we ask is not granted, we can safely expect the substitute gift—something that turns out to be exactly what is for our best interests.

Luckily for us God is not only a generous Father; He is a wise and farseeing protector of His children.

***I have been in a Catholic school all my life. It seems to me that it is time now that I got a chance to go to a non-Catholic college.***

On the contrary; this is precisely the time when you are ready to reap the benefits of your Catholic education. Up to and through high school one is merely bringing together the instruments of education. College is the place where these instruments are put to use. You'd make the greatest mistake if you laid aside the instruments of Catholic education at the very time when you are ready to gather the fullest results from the use of them.

The reasons against a Catholic's entering a non-Catholic college are many:

At best the non-Catholic college is indifferent to the Catholic faith and practice.

In most cases the professors will regard the Catholic religion as silly, obsolete, a matter of no importance, probably as wrong, harmful, ridiculous, maybe as positively evil.

Some of the faculty will be politely indifferent to the Catholic religion—and to Christ.

Some of them will be acutely hostile in such a skillful fashion that the brightest student will find himself unprepared to meet their arguments or answer the difficulties they present.

A great deal of modern education begins with the dogmas that man is an animal, that there is no God, that free will is a delusion, that the afterlife is a myth, that morals are merely current manners.

The social life of the campus is un-Catholic, often positively pagan in character. The students are in most cases ignorant of Catholicity and regard their Catholic fellow students with amused curiosity, indifference, contempt, pity, dislike. Because of this the number of Catholics permitted

in most of the fraternities and sororities is placed on a low quota. Catholics are barred from many of the swank clubs. The Catholic is obliged then to form for future friendships acquaintance with men and women who dislike Catholicity, regard Catholics as anachronisms, and politely ignore, cleverly ridicule, or violently dislike and attack the Catholic faith.

The number of Catholics who lose their faith in non-Catholic colleges is staggeringly large. Even if they do not lose it, they have spent four years in a minimum practice of their faith and a struggle to maintain some semblance of religious life in a totally un-Catholic atmosphere.

At best those who do keep their faith come out merely with their faith unharmed. In no sense has it been advanced, improved, strengthened, and made more intelligent through these precious four years.

In a Catholic college things are entirely different:

Christ Himself in the Eucharist dwells on the campus.

None of the classes or the faculty endanger or attack the faith.

The professors present the best of secular knowledge objectively and honestly.

The spirit of the classrooms and laboratories is Catholic.

For the first time the full philosophy of Christ is presented to the student in its complete form. Catholic religion becomes adult in its practice. Catholic philosophy establishes a firm foundation for future thinking and living.

The social life is Catholic. Your associates are predominantly Catholic and thus make possible Catholic friendships and associations for your future. You grow to know men and women who have the same faith and ideals that you have, people who become your friends for your entire life.

The Catholic college or university is the crown of Catholic education. It climaxes, completes, and polishes the systematic development of the Catholic leader.

Today prospective collegians can pick any one of hundreds of fine Catholic colleges. They are wise indeed if they

make a Catholic college their campus home and intellectual training ground for the full four years.

*Why should I ask God for anything? Everything is decided by God's holy will. So prayer cannot effect what God has decreed.*

Prayer cannot, in the human expression, make God change His mind. Yes that is correct. God does not decree something and then later on listen to a prayer and say, "Well we'll change that."

Our difficulty is in thinking of God always—or too often—in merely human terms. Let's take a human example and see how it works.

This particular father is very fond of his son. He is constantly trying to think of things that will make him happy. One day he hears the son talking with his mother.

"Mother," the boy says, "I'd like to go to college and then study to be a doctor. I wonder what dad would say to that?"

"Well," says the mother, thoughtfully, "I know that he'd like to see you go into business with him. But suppose you ask him."

As a matter of fact the father would like his son to enter the business he had been building up. But he says to himself, "If my boy wants to be a doctor enough to come to me and ask me, I'll make it possible for him to be a doctor."

The son comes and asks the father. The father says a swift, "God bless you, my son. Be a doctor, and be a good one."

You'll note that the father had made up his mind before the son came. He had conditioned his answer however on the son's question. "If he comes and asks, I'll say yes."

A great many things in the future are conditioned in that way. God has decreed that IF you pray for this, He will give it to you. If you do not pray, He won't. Foreseeing perfectly the future, He knows whether or not you will pray; but His decree will be to grant your request if you ask . . . not grant your request if you don't ask.

You see, God knows whether or not you will pray. He knows that He will answer your prayer in the way that will be for your greater happiness.

So you are pretty smart if you say that prayer.

God has plans for you, happy plans, if you say that prayer.

### ***What is the Heroic Act?***

It is an act of charity, of splendid, courageous love offered to God and souls by many a fine Catholic, religious and lay.

By this act the Catholic places, usually in the hands of the Blessed Virgin, all the merits he may earn on earth. He asks that these be used for the souls in purgatory. He offers in addition all the Masses and prayers and good works that may be offered for him after his death, releasing all these too for the souls in purgatory.

From the time that he makes his act, he does not profit by any of the indulgences and good works which might remit the temporal punishment due to his own sins. He transfers all these to the souls in purgatory. He further agrees to remain suffering in purgatory as long as God wishes and the guilt on his own soul demands.

So his purgatory may be very long and painful.

He takes this chance out of his desire to help others now and after his death.

### ***Shall we know our own in heaven?***

Indeed we shall.

That will be one of the great joys of heaven. We shall be eternally reunited with those we have known, loved, and perhaps lost on earth.

After all it is the characteristics of the soul which are distinctive, and it is the minds and wills of those we love which make them most lovable.

Then when our bodies rise from the grave, the reunion will be still more joyous and complete.

***Suppose it is Friday. You order meat in a restaurant; and when you begin to eat, you remember that it is Friday. Are you obliged not to eat the meat?***

If you would go hungry if you did not eat what you ordered, you may eat your dinner—that is, if you can't afford to spend money on another dinner, or if your canceling your order would mean a real inconvenience to others. But if you are not running the danger of going hungry by not eating the meat, you shouldn't eat it.

***May one eat until one o'clock in the morning under daylight-saving time and still go to Holy Communion?***

Yes.

It is permitted to follow any system of time that exists or has been recognized in a particular section of the country. So you may follow sun time, or daylight-saving time, which is one hour faster than sun time. On sun time midnight is twelve o'clock. On daylight-saving time one o'clock is still midnight.

Take your choice.

***What kind of sin did Adam and Eve commit? I've heard that it was a sin of impurity.***

It was clearly a sin of disobedience. But then in a way all sins are sins of disobedience. They are all a refusal to obey God's law.

It is hard to say just where arose the misapprehension about our first parents' sin's being one of impurity. Possibly that came about through a misunderstanding of the word concupiscence. Strictly concupiscence means any desire. There was on the part of Adam and Eve a strong desire for power, to be like God, to eat the forbidden fruit. So concupiscence was involved.

When human desires become inclined toward evil instead of toward good, this state is referred to as the growth of concupiscence.

A great many people though think that all desire is the desire of the flesh. Such thinking is not correct, though it is

possible that that desire is the one that most vividly impresses human beings.

At any rate there was a confusion, and the desires of Adam and Eve became mixed up in people's minds with the concupiscence of the flesh.

### *Why do we always have an Italian Pope?*

History reveals that there have been Popes of the widest range of nationalities. There have been Popes who were Jewish, Greek, German, African, Italian, French, one even British.

Within the past centuries the office of Pope has become a very technical post. The Pope is ruler of the tiny Vatican State. He is in constant communication with the countries of the world and their representatives. He must be able to handle easily the enormous detail of his office. An untrained, inexperienced man might well be lost in this welter of detail and this mass of essential and official routine.

Hence the men best suited for the office are those cardinals who have lived long in the Vatican City and know its background, procedure, and complicated detail.

If a man better suited to handle all this were found among those cardinals of other nations, he might easily be chosen Pope. Right now the men best trained are the Italian cardinals, who live constantly in the atmosphere of the Vatican.

But any change of conditions might change entirely our idea of the type of man best suited for the office of Holy Father.

### *Is there anything one can do to make Catholics more friendly?*

Yes. Each of us personally can start being more friendly.

Often friendliness is just a matter of being friendly and deserving friendship and showing signs of wanting friendship from others.

In their defense let us remember that Catholics go to church to worship God. They are not inclined to think of



their church as a social center, as many non-Catholics think of their church.

Beyond that most Catholics are really very social people. They lead pleasant home lives. They love good music. They enjoy social events and are inclined to be fond of parties. They are great for starting and joining societies. If anything, they seem to conduct too many societies. For almost any kind of excuse they will get together to eat and talk.

Perhaps however because of their minority status in America and because of frequent persecution and the continued contempt and dislike shown them by certain groups, Catholics may tend to withdraw a little into themselves. They become distrustful or have an inherited distrust of strangers. They cling to those they know and are sure of.

Maybe if Catholics acquired a little more self-confidence, if they were more conscious of their own magnificent cultural tradition, if they were prouder of their history and surer of their value to the world at large, they might be less shy of strangers, even of Catholic strangers.

And if they remembered that friendliness is a form of charity and can be a high supernatural virtue, they might practice it more freely.

But friendliness wins friendliness.

Perhaps what we need is a Catholic campaign called, "Let's Speak to Another Catholic Today."

*I go to confession. I try my best to make a good confession. Then afterward I am not sure whether or not I have really made a good confession. What shall I do?*

First of all and essential before all a person suffering from scruples should get a good confessor. He should trust him implicitly and obey all his orders without hesitation.

The world is full of scrupulous people: some about things in business, some about their duty to their family, some about dirt, some about religion. For some a physician is needed. For some a priest is the best friend. For spiritual scruples the priest is the doctor.

To him the most implicit obedience should be given, really as if one were obeying God. God will bless that kind of obedience.

It is however a good thing occasionally to realize how silly scruples are.

A person tries to make a good confession. If he sincerely tries, he may be perfectly sure that his confession is good. For God is far more anxious to forgive sins than we are to be freed from them. If a person does his best, God supplies all else.

With time a person should learn to think far less of his sins than of the mercy and love of God. He should compare gratefully the slight and sketchy confession made by the prodigal son and the swift forgiveness granted by the father. He should remember how eagerly Christ forgave the repentant Peter and the sorrowing Magdalen.

God loves us. The scrupulous person should put that statement directly and keep saying over and over to himself, "God loves me; God loves me."

The mere fact of his anxiety to be in God's grace should become proof of his own sincerity. That desire makes a confession heartfelt. It is the surest lien that we can place on God's forgiveness.

But in the end it all boils down to this: Get the right confessor, trust him implicitly, and do what he orders.

### *Religion is so old-fashioned.*

So what? Food is old-fashioned, as is the old-fashioned custom of drinking—anything from water to vintage wine.

Mothers are a really old-fashioned institution. And is there anything very modern about the state or about civil government?

Poetry is old-fashioned, and so is the art of painting. There has always been among people the fashion to sing; and in the spring—ever since the first spring broke over Eden—it has been the fashion to dance. Conversation between friends is old-fashioned . . . and I cannot think of a time in history when people did not gather for parties. Games and sports are old-fashioned; the most primitive

drawings show the human being madly pursuing some kind of inanimate object or hitting it violently with some sort of stick.

Usually however the word old-fashioned implies out of date.

When mother love and the security of home, good dinners and pleasant evenings with friends, dancing to an orchestra and straining one's energies to make or cheer for the winning point are out of date, then religion may be out of date too.



# INDEX

- Abstinence, on Fridays, 53; pledge, 20.  
Act of charity, heroic, 52.  
Adam and Eve and original sin, 53.  
Age at which to marry, 6.  
Aloofness of priests and nuns, 34.  
Annulment of marriage, 42.  
Apostles and direct succession, 37.  
Apostles' Creed and Ten Commandments, 4.  
Association with lay people by priests and nuns, 34.
- Bachelorhood as a state of life, 33, 34.  
Beatific vision, 44.  
Belief in the Catholic Church, 37.  
Bible, the, and birth control, 25; and drink, 17; and gambling, 40; and prayer, 48; Protestant attitude toward, 36; and union in the Church, 38.  
Bingo and financial support of the Church, 39.  
Birth control, and the natural law, 25; and continence, 26.  
Blessing of the bride at nuptial Mass, 23.  
"Blue stories" and Christian standards, 24.  
Books, Catholic, for non-Catholics, 45.  
Bride, blessing of, at nuptial Mass, 23.  
Broadmindedness of Catholics, 36.
- Calvinism and sex, 27.  
Cana, wedding feast of, and drink, 17.  
Cardinals and the nationality of the Pope, 54.  
"Carrying a Torch," 13.  
Catholic books for non-Catholics, 45.  
Catholic Action and modern youth, 7.  
Catholicism, non-Catholic colleges hostile to, 50; the true religion, 37, 38, 43.  
Ceremonies, non-Catholic, 38, 39.  
Charity, heroic act of, 52.  
Children, and birth control, 25; the Church's teaching about, 26, 27; and drink, 17; and duties to parents, 32, 33; and their parents, 25-27; and the Rhythm Theory, 26; and sex instructions, 27.  
Christ, on the Catholic campus, 49, 50; and Church unity, 38; and conversion, 43, 44; and the direct succession of the Popes, 37; and Papal infallibility, 36; and prayer, 48; and the sacraments, 36; and the saints, 10, 56; and vocations, 29; and the will of God, 48.
- Church, the, and doctrine, 36; financial support of, 8, 39, 40; and happiness, 37; invisible, 43; Protestant, 38; reasons for belief in, 36; sufficiency of, and the commandments, 43.  
Colleges, Catholic, 49; and faith, 50; and free will, 50; non-Catholic, 49; and vocations, 31, 32.  
Commandments, the, and Christian youth, 7; and prudery, 21; safeguards for the Apostles' Creed, 4; and the sufficiency of the Catholic Church, 38, 39.  
Communion, and fasting, 53; frequent, 7; vocations deriving strength from, 30ff; and young people, 6.  
Conception, of the human soul, 12; and contraceptives, 25.  
Concupiscence and original sin, 53.  
Conduct, on dates, 9ff; and purity, 21.  
Confession, and conversions, 44, 45; and the prodigal son, 56; scruples in, 55.  
Confessor, confidence in, 31; and scruples, 55; and vocations, 28ff.  
Continence in marriage, 26.  
Contraceptives, 25.  
Convent, the, and parental objections to, 32; when to enter, 31.  
Conversion, and confession, 44; and Mary, 44; means of, 38; and mixed marriages, 43; of non-Catholic parents and relatives, 43-45.  
Converts and the faith, 45.  
Conway, Father Bertrand, and "The Question Box," 5.  
Creed, Apostles', and the commandments, 4.  
"Crushes" and "puppy loves," 13.
- Dates, conduct on, 22; and drinking, 17; and "going steady," 15; and kissing, 9, 10; and music, 24; planning for, 24.  
Direct apostolic succession in the Church, 37.  
Dirty stories and Christian standards, 24, 25.  
Divorce, and birth control, 25, 26; and marriage, 41.  
Doctrines of the Catholic Church, 36.

- Drinking, and children, 17; on dates, 19; and drunkenness, 19; and food, 19; at home and outside, 18; and the pledge, 20; and sacrifice, 21; and St. Paul, 17; as a stimulant, 18; and temptations to impurity, 20; and the wedding feast of Cana, 17; and youth, 18, 19.
- Education, Catholic, 49, 50; duties of parents toward, 33; and Masonry, 40; in the parochial school, 7; as preparation for life and vocations, 30-32; sex, 27.
- Evil, of birth control, 25ff; of "going steady," 15.
- Faith, the, converts to, 45; in non-Catholic colleges, 49; and prayer, 48, 51; and salvation, 41.
- Financial support of the Church, 8, 39, 40.
- Food and drink, 20.
- Free will, and predestination, 46; taught in non-Catholic colleges, 49.
- Friendliness of Catholics, 54.
- Funerals, non-Catholic, 39.
- Future, the, and prayer, 51.
- Gambling, and financial support of the Church, 8, 39; and scandal, 39.
- "Going steady," dangers of, 15; and effects on marriage, 15.
- Grace, 44. Cf. *Communion, Vocations*.
- Habits of sin and vocations, 28.
- Happiness, in the Catholic Church, 37; in heaven with friends and relatives, 52; in marriage, 26; in mixed marriages, 43ff; of parents whose children have religious vocations, 34; in virtue, 22.
- Heaven, attainment of, 28, 44; happiness in, 52; and predestination, 46.
- Heroic act of charity, 52.
- Hierarchy in Rome and the nationality of the Pope, 54.
- History and young people, 6.
- Holy See and the nationality of the Pope, 54.
- Home, the Catholicity of, 33; and conversion of non-Catholic relatives, 43; drink in, 17ff; and sex instructions, 27.
- Impurity, and drink, 20; and birth control, 26; and improper touches, 14. Cf. *Conduct, Dates, Passion, Temptation*.
- Indulgences and the poor souls, 52.
- Infallibility of the Pope, 36ff.
- Invisible Church, the, 43.
- Jansenism and sex, 27.
- Kissing, on dates, 10; and paganism, 11; a sin, 9.
- Latin America and Masonry, 40.
- Liquor, 17ff.
- Lotteries, as a means of Church support, 39; and scandal, 39.
- Love, counterfeit, 11; and mixed marriages, 42, 43; and necking, 12; and the powers of creation, 25, 26.
- Magdalen, Mary, and repentance, 10, 56.
- Marriage, after divorce, 41; age for, 6; ceremony and blessing of the bride, 23; continence in, 26; and "going steady," 15; happiness in, 26, 43ff; love in, 13, 41; mixed, and conversion, 42, 43; and the nuptial Mass, 23, 43; parental consent to, 33; and Pauline Privilege, 41; and vocation, 35.
- Mary, appeal of, 23; and conversions, 45; example for youth, 7; and vocations, 28ff.
- Magdalen, Mary, and repentance, 10, 56.
- Masonry, and Catholicism, 40; in Latin America, 40; and parochial schools, 40.
- Maturity, a prerequisite for marriage, 6.
- Minority of Catholics, 55.
- Mixed marriages, and conversion of non-Catholic partner, 42, 43; and divorce, 41; and happiness, 43ff; and Pauline Privilege, 41; successes and failures, 17.
- Money and the Church, 8, 39.
- Morals, and faith, 4; non-Catholic colleges' teaching on, 49, 50. Cf. *Birth control, Conduct, Dates*.
- Motherhood foreshadowed at nuptial Mass, 23.
- Music, and planned dates, 24; as a wholesome recreation, 24.
- Mystical Body of Christ, and faith in the Church, 38; and non-Catholic religious ceremonies, 38.
- Narrowmindedness of Catholics, 36.
- Nationality of the Pope, 54.
- Natural Law, the, and birth control, 25.
- Necking, 12.
- Non-Catholic, churches, 38, 50; conversions, 36, 42ff; and free will, 49; funerals, 39; hostility to Catholic-

- ism, 50; and love, 42; and the validity of marriage, 41; and mortal sin, 43; parents and relatives, 43ff; and the sacraments, 43, 44; and salvation, 43; schools, 49; weddings, 39.
- Nuptial Mass, 23, 43.
- Old-fashioned religion, 56.
- Original sin and concupiscence, 53.
- Paganism, and kissing, 11; and modern youth, 6; in non-Catholic schools, 49.
- Papal infallibility, 36ff.
- Parents, and birth control, 26, 27; and children, 32, 33; and children's vocations, 28ff; and duties of married life, 26; and sex instructions, 27.
- Parochial schools, and Catholic education, 7; and Masonry, 40.
- Passion, and drink, 18ff; and "going steady," 15; aroused by kissing, 9; aroused by necking, 12.
- Passion of Christ and the will of God, 48.
- Pauline Privilege, 41.
- Paulist Fathers, the, and "The Question Box," 5.
- Persecution, and youth, 7; and Catholic aloofness, 54.
- "Petting," 11. *Cf. Dates, Drink, Passion.*
- Philosophy, Catholic, and education, 49, 50.
- Pledge of abstinence from liquor, 20.
- Poor souls, the, and indulgences, 52.
- Pope, infallibility of, 36ff; nationality of, 54.
- Poverty, and birth control, 26; evil of, 27; and vocations, 32.
- Prayer, faith in, 48; and grace, 44; and the heroic act of charity, 52; and predestination, 51; union in, 38; and vocations, 31ff.
- Predestination, and free will, 46, 47; and prayer, 51; and salvation, 46.
- Priesthood, and parents, 32, 33; vocation to, 28ff.
- Procreation and love, 12, 25. *Cf. Birth Control.*
- Prodigal son and confession, 56.
- Protestant Church, 38.
- Prudery and the Ten Commandments, 21.
- Punishment due to sin, 52.
- "Puppy love," 13.
- Purgatory, indulgences, and the heroic act, 52.
- Puritanism and sex, 27.
- Purity, and kissing, 9; and necking, 12; and prudery, 21.
- "Question Box, The," 5.
- Religion, and conversions, 36, 43ff; effect of, on modern youth, 6; and Masonry, 40; and mixed marriages, 41; old-fashioned, 56; Protestant, 38; in schools, 49; true, 39.
- Religious vocations, 31ff; *Cf. Vocations.*
- Repentance, and Mary Magdalen, 10, 56; of non-Catholics, 43; of Peter, 56; and the prodigal son, 56.
- Resurrection of the body, 52.
- Rhythm Theory, 26.
- Rights in religion, 38ff.
- Sacraments, and Christ, 37; and non-Catholics, 44; and supernatural life, 44; and youth, 6.
- Sacrifice and drink, 19, 20.
- St. Mary Magdalen and repentance, 10, 56.
- St. Paul and wine, 17.
- St. Peter, and repentance, 56; the "rock," 39.
- Saints, in the Catholic Church, 10, 37, 56; personalities of, 21; and the state of virginity, 33, 34.
- Salvation, and Masonry, 40; of non-Catholics, 43; and predestination, 46; and vocations, 29.
- Sanctity of Christ and Mary, 22.
- Sanctifying grace, 44.
- Scandal, caused by Catholics' attending non-Catholic ceremonies, 39; and parish gambling, 39; *Cf. Money and the Church.*
- School system, Catholic, 7, 40, 49ff.
- Scruples in the confessional, 55.
- Sex, and birth control, 25ff; evil interpretation of, 27; and "going steady," 15; instructions, 27; and necking and petting, 12.
- Sin: *Cf. Sex, Dates, Conduct, Drink, Birth control.*
- Social life, Catholic, 60; in Catholic colleges, 54; and drink, 17; and music, 24; in non-Catholic colleges, 49; and temptations to sin, 24; and youth, 15. *Cf. Dates.*
- Spiritual director, 30ff. *Cf. Vocations.*
- "Spooning," 12.
- Standards, and conduct on dates, 21; Christian, and dirty stories, 24, 25.
- State of life, 27ff. *Cf. Vocations, Marriage, Priesthood.*

- Succession, apostolic, in the Church, 37.
- Supernatural life of grace and the sacraments, 43, 44.
- Temptations, and drink, 17ff; and "going steady," 15; and kissing, 9; and necking, 12; in social life, 24.
- Ten Commandments, the, 7. *Cf. Commandments.*
- Trinity, the, and the life of God in the soul, 44.
- True religion, the, 37.
- Unity of the Catholic Church, 37, 38.
- Validity of marriage, 41, 42.
- Vatican, the, and nationality of the Pope, 54.
- Virginity, saints, and vocations, 33, 34.
- Vision, beatific, 44.
- Virtue, and happiness, 22; and the heroic act of charity, 52.
- Vocations, and Christ, 29; and communion, 30ff; and confessors, 28ff; and convents, 31ff; and education, 31ff; and habits of sin, 28; happiness in, 33; marriage as, 35; and Mary, 28ff; and parents, 28ff; and prayer, 31ff; preparation for, 15; priestly, 28ff; and salvation, 29; signs of, 28ff; and spiritual director, 30ff; and virginity, 33, 34.
- Wedding feast of Cana and drink, 17.
- Weddings, Catholic attendance at non-Catholic, 39. *Cf. Marriage.*
- Will, free, 46, 51; of God, and the Passion of Christ, 48.
- Wine and Drink, 17ff. *Cf. Drinking.*
- Worldliness of priests and nuns, 34.
- Youth, and Catholic Action, 7; Catholic education of, 7, 49; and drinking, 18, 19; and history, 6; and the liturgical movement, 7; and Mary, 7; and persecution, 7; and religion, 6; and the Ten Commandments, 7.



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