

# A Letter to Catholics

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CATHOLICS



*by*

RICHARD GINDER

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ONE of my friends is a politician. He is not a Catholic, which may be an advantage for an ambitious young lawyer. He is youthful, handsome, pleasing in his personality, polished — in general, the type of all-around American boy grown up. When we were youngsters, he went to the Methodist Church. And he was a good boy — faithful at church, punctual at school, thrifty and industrious. As time passed, our paths divided. Our family moved to another city. But we kept in touch indirectly and I followed his pro-

gress with great interest. He went to a great university where he got his A.B. and entered law school. He won himself a scholarship after his first year. He interested himself in the politics of the university town and made influential friends.

After graduation with high honors, he picked himself a thriving little city in the center of the state, married, and settled down to practice — as a junior partner in a leading law firm. I was told that he had switched over to the Presbyterian Church because he could make better contacts.

### **ROTARIANS, ELKS, AND CATHOLICS**

And that set me thinking. To my friend, church was on a business basis. He chose his church as he might have chosen his clubs. He was a Presbyterian, just as he was a Rotarian, an Elk, and a member of Epsilon Gamma Upsilon. It was a matter of mere "affiliation," something that would look standard on an application

form, where the blank is always placed two or three spaces from the bottom as though religion were a very trivial factor in the life of a man of affairs.

One cannot say that all Methodists, all Presbyterians, take their denominational beliefs so lightly, for there is a world of difference, theologically, between Methodism and Presbyterianism or Calvinism. The one teaches salvation through a "conversion" freely accepted; the other teaches salvation by an inexorable decree of the Almighty, forced on us whether we want it or not. And there are a host of Methodists by conviction who would rather be Catholics than Presbyterians, and Presbyterians who would rather be Catholics than Methodists.

It led me to wonder, though, and to speculate on the question, the probability even, of there being Catholics who "belong" to the Catholic Church as a matter

of more or less routine heritage. Catholics they were born and Catholics they will die — not through convictions fought through and deeply realized, but through a sort of mental sluggishness. They would as soon be anything else, if it did not entail a change in their thinking processes. In fact, a good push would send them spinning out of the Faith and into whatever church proved most convenient.

### **PRESSURE AGAINST CATHOLICS**

Many of us have run into situations when it was hard being Catholics — a mill town, say, into which a Catholic plant-manager walks only to find that he is surrounded at Mass by his molders, core-makers, and day-laborers, while all the other white-collar men in the town are at the leading Protestant Church; where there may be a Protestant elite keeping a throttle-hold on the social activities of the community, a highly organized Masonic



unit, such that he, his wife, and his children, are fairly ostracized for their Catholicism. There are such communities, thousands of them, within a half hour's drive of every major city in the country.

And that tests the mettle of the man. He either gets a fresh grip on his Faith or he loses it. The local pastor sees the drama enacted time and again. New families settle, introduce themselves, and then either stick or fall off.

A family will come from Central Europe. The old folks are all right. For them the Church is a tie with their past. But the youngsters get a new set of brains. They are ashamed of their parentage. They speak the foreign language as small children, but lose it as they get along in school. Then, they change their names. Russo becomes Russell, Riczewski becomes Rice; Amwasser becomes Atwater. The only thing obstructing complete acceptance

among the "white Protestant" elite is, of course, religion.

That can be settled by marriage with one of the "white Protestants" before the minister of the most fashionable church in town, and the inevitable two children are christened in due time and enrolled in that particular Sunday School. And when mamma or papa dies, she (or he) goes to hell for having sold her soul at a price.

Or it can be arranged by apostasy — cold and callous. This Sunday, St. Patrick's Church; next Sunday, Grace Evangelical. It's happening every day.

### **LET'S NOT GET DROWSY**

And the danger is that some of us may be lulled into precisely the same attitude; the acceptance of membership in the Catholic Church as something on a par with membership in Rotary, or the Elks, or the American Legion — the difference

being that Catholic "meetings" are held Sunday mornings instead of weekday evenings, and the dues are lifted in a collection basket instead of being paid by check in response to a bill.

But the Catholic Church is more than a fraternity, a club, or a society. It is an organization, but one that provides a complete philosophy of life, one that reaches into our lives and grips every moment of our existence, with a program outlined for our every thought, word, and action.

Catholicism, as an idea, is on a par with Communism in the sense that it is totalitarian. It demands our whole soul. Were we good Catholics, we should blaze with a Faith equal in pitch to the perverted fervor of thorough-going Communists. They are ablaze with destruction; ours is to build up, to edify. Theirs is negative; ours is positive. They will spread error;

we will spread truth. They worship the proletariat, we worship the living God.

But we must be gripped as deeply by our doctrine as they by theirs — personally and socially. We shall, we must, save our souls by constant union with God; and we must help others to that personal salvation which brings with it joy and peace now and later; but in doing that we shall save the world.

### **THE BACKWARD MARCH**

Indeed they have taught us a lesson. They have shown us what can be done by total devotion to an idea; evil, it is true, which has brought forth evil, in flower and branch. Only think of it, the Russian Revolution took place in 1917. Since then, a period of 29 years, Communism has well nigh swept the earth. Christianity has been in possession for 1912 years. At first it swept the earth. But since that first high

watermark, let's make it the fourth century, our boundaries have shrunk.

In the seventh century Mohammed stripped us of Africa and Turkey. We lost Eastern Europe, including Russia, to the Orthodox Schismatics in the tenth century. In the sixteenth century, we lost England and Northern Europe. Our strength now is concentrated in Latin America, and in southern and central Europe. So far has the Empire of Christ been reduced!

We have the truth and we're sitting down with it. First of all, we're not completely "sold" on it ourselves. Notice the men and women, yes, and children, standing on street corners and hawking copies of trash for Jehovah's Witness. Would we do it? I wonder — when we can't even fill the Church for an evening benediction service . . .

### **A FEW TEST QUESTIONS**

Are we weekly Communicants? Do we

read any spiritual books? Do we subscribe to any Catholic periodicals? — and if we do, do we read them. Do we visit the Blessed Sacrament? Do we say our morning and night prayers with devotion? — or are they just a set form recited mechanically and out of habit? Do we think of Jesus living in our Hearts? How are we at Mass: thumb-twiddlers?

Do we make an effort to gain converts? Are we aggressive about our Faith, or just a wee bit self-conscious of it? Are we doing anything in the way of Catholic Action? Do we hold up our end in conversations on religion, or do we turn into a Caspar Milquetoast? Are we ashamed of our Catholic truths and principles? Do we try to meet and answer the questions of strangers about our Faith? Do we defend our priests and nuns? Are we interested (ah, here's the test) — are we interested in our foreign missions and conversant

with their problems? If we have a growing son, do we refuse to let him discuss the possibility of his having a vocation to the priesthood until he's "old enough" (whatever age that might be)?

You see, I'm just picking out questions at random. If we were honest-to-goodness Catholics we could give the right answers to all of them.

But we shilly-shally. We get along on the minimum required by Church Law. The fact is, we are, some of us, only half-Catholics.

### **CHRIST WANTS TOTAL CATHOLICS**

Christ wants through and through Catholics, men and women with spunk, Catholics who almost carry a chip on their shoulders. He wants us to be Catholics all the way around the clock every day of the week. We must live our utmost to God, at all times, in Christ Jesus. Every thought, every word, every action, must

be dedicated to the greater glory of God. We must stop frequently, and make this dedication consciously. We must always be aware of the fact that as some men are Communists, we are Catholics — men and women with a blazing idea. We carry a torch with which the world must be kindled. It is ours to set the universe flaming with the love of God. We can do it — we must do it, else we shall see it afire with a false doctrine which will not light and purify it but will burn it to a cinder.



# *Don't*

## **TURN THIS DOWN**

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214 WEST 31st STREET • NEW YORK 1, N. Y.

*Published by*

**THE CATHOLIC INFORMATION SOCIETY**

**214 West 31st St., New York 1, N. Y.**

**(OPPOSITE PENN TERMINAL)**



