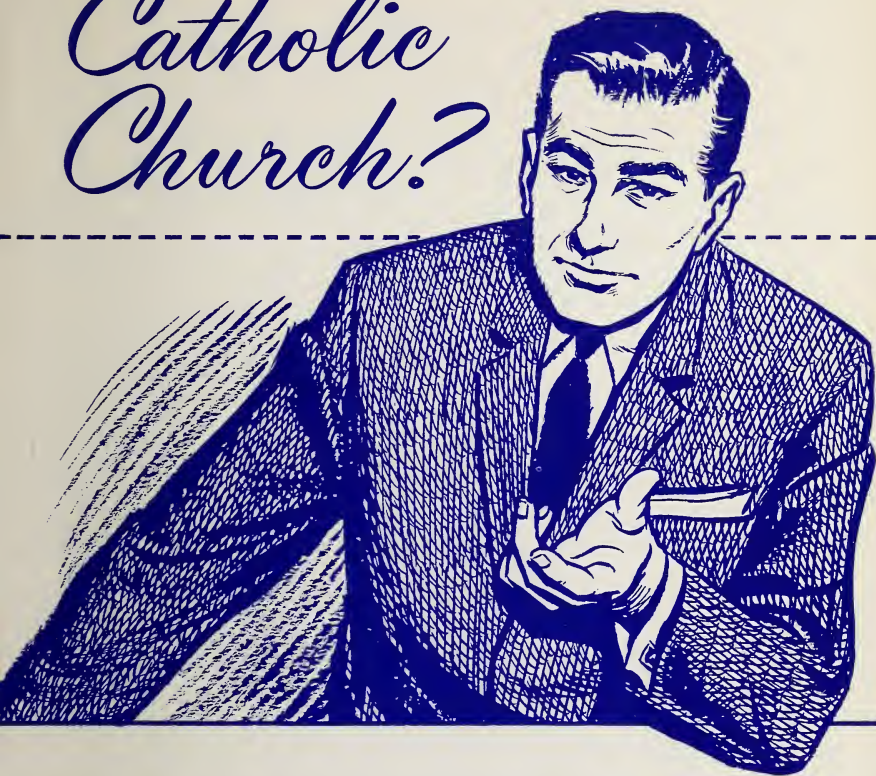


What do you find wrong with the

Catholic Church?



- **Why Some People Dislike The Catholic Church**
- **Why Some People Do Not Become Catholics**
- **Why People Quit Going to Church**
- **How to Come Back to the Church**

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Why the Knights of Columbus Advertise Catholic Faith

The reason is simple. We Catholics want our non-Catholic friends and neighbors to know us as we really are and not as we are some times mistakenly represented.

We are confident that when our religious Faith is better understood by those who do not share it, mutual understanding will promote the good-will which is so necessary in a predominantly Christian country whose government is designed to serve all the people—no matter how much their religious convictions may differ.

American Catholics are convinced that as the teachings of Christ widely and firmly take hold of the hearts and conduct of our people, we shall remain free in the sense that Christ promised (John VIII, 31-38), and in the manner planned by the Founding Fathers of this republic.

Despite the plainly stated will of the Good Shepherd that there be "one fold and one shepherd," the differences in the understanding of Christ's teaching are plainly evident. It has rightfully been called "the scandal of a divided Christianity."

If there is anything which will gather together the scattered flock of Christ, it is the nationwide understanding of the Savior, what He did and how He intended mankind to benefit by the Redemption.

To this end, we wish our fellow-Americans to become acquainted with the teachings of Christ as the Catholic Church has faithfully presented them, since the day the apostles invaded the nations of the world in willing and courageous obedience to Christ's command: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. XXVIII, 19).

**SUPREME COUNCIL
KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS
Religious Information Bureau
4422 LINDELL BLVD. ST. LOUIS 8, MO.**

Why Some People Dislike The Catholic Church



No one can live in America and keep up with the currents and cross-currents of public opinion and sentiment without becoming aware that in the hearts of many people, there is very great dislike for the Catholic Church. Expression is given to this dislike, sometimes in private conversation, sometimes in public speeches, and often in published material in periodicals and books.

Only the most naive optimist would deny the fact that thousands do dislike the Catholic Church and almost all it stands for.

The question that intrigues the mind is that which is concerned with the chief cause of this opposition. We think we have the answer, and that a study of the answer will be of help both to those who cherish the Catholic faith and to those who fear and dislike it.

The basic element in the Catholic religion that not only sets it apart from all other religious sects and denominations, but also arouses violent opposition in non-members is *its insistence on obedience to human beings whom it declares to be invested with an authority backed*

up by the authority of God.

The great scandal and stumbling-block to most opponents of the Catholic religion is the fact that there are priests, bishops, a Pope—all men like themselves—who are said to wield spiritual religious authority over their fellow human beings.

That this is the key to most of the opposition to the Catholic Church is amply demonstrated by three classes of people.

The first class is the whole vast body of non-Catholic Christians, of all sects and shades of opinion. We are aware that many of them are sincere in their beliefs and even in opposition to the Catholic Church. In no way do we accuse them of dishonesty or malice. But they themselves will agree with us when we say that what disturbs and upsets them about the Catholic religion is the fact that in it one must give spiritual respect and obedience to men like themselves, who are said to speak with the authority of God.

There are a hundred forms in which they take exception to this particular feature of Catholicism. They say that they give obedience

only to God; that no man can represent the authority of God. They say, many of them, that their salvation is effected through faith in Jesus Christ alone, not through obedience. Some add that obedience even to the ten commandments is impossible, and that therefore faith as the chief factor, must be stressed all the more. Others say that obedience to God is possible and necessary, but that God directly inspires every believer in Christ as to what His commands are; that He never transmits a command through other men. Some say that the Bible is all they need to learn the will of God.

All agree, however, that the idea of obeying a Pope or a bishop or a priest in religious matters is absolutely repugnant, irrational and wrong.

Fallen Aways

The second class consists of fallen-away Catholics, who bear witness to the fact that obedience to men as the representatives of God's authority is the most repugnant feature of Catholicism. The abandonment of the Catholic faith by those who have had a real knowledge of what it means, almost invariably involves resistance to the clergy and ecclesiastical authority. An excellent example of this are ex-priests, who, if they take to platforms and editorial desks to express their feelings, blast continuously on the same theme, viz.; that Popes, bishops and priests are undeserving of respect, to say nothing of obedience.

Most renegade lay-Catholics have

stumbled against the rock of obedience; they had a quarrel with a pastor, or could not accept a regulation of their bishop, or entered a marriage forbidden by the Church, or were refused absolution by a priest because they would not renounce a certain pet sin. Animosity toward the Church is thereafter expressed mostly in disparaging remarks about its officials.

Dissenters

The third class of people who demonstrate the fact that obedience is the most difficult commandment is composed of those who have no time for any formal religion, but who are aroused to spasms of fury over the fact that anyone could think of obeying fellow human beings as representatives of God.

These are the arch anti-clericals of the world. They identify religion with clericalism, i.e., a hierarchy of spiritual superiors, and they devote their energies to trying to destroy such a hierarchy. Communists are a good example. It is noteworthy that they spend little time opposing Protestantism, and may even make an alignment with it as Stalin did in Russia. It is the Catholic hierarchy that they want to destroy.

Another example is the so-called intelligentsia in America, men who make science, secular learning, worldly wisdom, the end of life. Usually professors in secular universities or famous figures in the arts and sciences, they speak with especial scorn of the "intellectual and moral subservience" of loyal Catholics.

All these classes of opponents of the obedience required in the Catholic Church make use of a certain number of cliches or pet phrases to express their stand. They say that the Catholic Church is "fascist" because its system of obedience makes dictators out of ecclesiastical authorities. It is "undemocratic" because rank and file Catholics have no chance to vote on its doctrines and laws. It is ambitious of power because it wants to "regiment" all nations and peoples under its standard.

Now, for the sake of the non-Catholic, the fallen-away Catholic and the pagan, there is here presented the background and the foundation of obedience as it is accepted and practiced by Catholics. Of course it must be remembered throughout that the obedience Catholics are bound to give to their ecclesiastical superiors is confined to spiritual and moral matters. It is not expected that this explanation will destroy all opposition to such obedience, but it will enlighten those who do not know why it is demanded, and it may strengthen those who have been wavering in its practice within the Catholic fold.

Authority

The first point to be noticed about obedience to ecclesiastical superiors is the fact that it rests against a pattern or policy established by God, which pattern may be expressed as follows:

God has so created man that in all his relationships to other men

he finds himself in some way bound to obey the authority of God as it is exercised through other human beings.

The force of the argument is this: There is no area of human association in which men are not clearly bound to some form of obedience to other human beings holding the authority of God; therefore one may expect that in religious matters the same divine policy will be carried out and the same kind of obedience to men will be demanded by God.

The pattern or policy of such obedience is clear throughout the entire realm of natural dependencies in which men may find themselves.

Obedience

When a child is born into the world, its first and most important form of obedience, binding as soon as reason dimly dawns, is to its human parents. God created the soul of the child, and, of course, has the sole ultimate authority over it. But God does not directly exercise His authority over the child; He does so through the parents who cooperated with Him in bringing it into being. The child needs someone to feed and clothe it, to protect it, to guide it and teach it, to help it develop into maturity. The parents are obviously selected to fulfill these tasks and to do so in the name of God. Out of this situation arranged by God arises the commandment that is both a natural and a positive divine law: "Honor thy father and thy mother."

Again, when men carry out the demands of their nature and combine to form a state, they are left free by God to form whatever kind of state they prefer. In so doing, however, they must choose civil officials and rulers to hold authority. Once they have chosen these rulers, they are bound to recognize that these men, men though they are, exercise the authority of God in all things pertaining to their office, and must be respected and obeyed in those matters.

Obligations

When men unite together in a business enterprise, it is obvious from the nature of such organizations that there must be an authority that directs the efforts of all toward the accomplishment of the work to be done and the goal to be attained. No man is bound to associate himself with any particular business enterprise, but once he does enter into one, he must recognize that obedience to the human authority in charge, in all things pertaining to the purpose to be attained and excluding sin, is binding on him in conscience because all rightful authority is exercised in the name of God.

When a man is sick, his instinct for life and health, his conscience and his reason all tell him that he must place himself under the care of a physician who is equipped to help him regain his health. The physician has authority in this situation, and the patient must obey him if he is to be made well and to fulfill the law of God.

Thus in the natural order the pattern of God's will becomes clear; there is no escape from obedience to authority held by human superiors, and the necessities are so great, the situations in which it is called for are so "natural" and universal, that this is clearly the way in which God intended that human beings be ruled. And no circumstances, barring only that in which a human authority commands something sinful or clearly outside the competence of his position, justifies a person in saying: "I never have to obey a man; I give obedience only to God."

The same pattern manifests itself throughout the whole course of God's dealings with mankind on the plane of religion. Anyone who maintains that true religion excludes entirely any need of giving obedience to a human representative of God must at the same time set down as fable every one of a thousand instances in which God directly revealed that He was speaking to men through other men whom He had endowed with His authority.

"In My Name"

The Old Testament of the Bible is poor background against which to defend the thesis that God demands obedience solely to Himself and never to any human representative in the New Testament. From the time of Adam's sin down to the day when the Son of God appeared in the world, it was human beings whom God chose, enlightened and sent to speak in His name to His

people. Such were the patriarchs, Abraham and Moses; such were the judges, kings, high priests and prophets, most of whom combined both a kind of civil authority with a religious authority to direct the souls of the children of God. As a proof that He had entrusted His authority to them God often permitted them to work astounding miracles, proofs that it was in His name that they spoke and commanded.

Shall Men Obey?

The second feature of obedience as demanded in the Catholic Church is a point of fact and history, and may be expressed as follows:

Against the background of the universal pattern and policy just explained, Jesus Christ actually set up a spiritual authority in the world, to be administered by men and to be obeyed by men as the authority of God.

It would indeed have been strange if, having decreed from the beginning of creation that children should obey their parents and citizens their civil rulers and employees their employers and the chosen people their patriarchs, priests, kings and prophets, Jesus Christ would have suddenly broken the pattern and decreed that never again, in spiritual matters, would any human being ever hold authority over another human being, and that never again would man be expected to obey man.

It would be stranger still that Jesus Christ spent only some thirty-odd years on earth, and only three of these in public preaching, if He intended to delegate none of His au-

thority to other human beings, but to hold it all in His own hands, even after He had disappeared from view.

But there is no need to speculate on these curiosities; there is the irrefutable historical fact that He used His few years of public life to delegate His authority; to entrust men with the responsibility to transmit His message and to speak in His name; to set up a Church, around a nucleus of human leaders, which He promised to protect as a source of truth to the end of time.

There is no need to present an exhaustive list of texts to prove this historical fact. Some are so clear in themselves that there is only one way to escape obedience to the human representatives of Christ and that is to deny that Christ ever spoke the words at all. Consider these few:

1. (To Peter) "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth it shall be loosed also in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

2. (To all the Apostles) "Going therefore teach ye all nations... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (Matthew 28:18-20).

3. (To the disciples) "He that heareth you, heareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth Him that sent me" (Luke 10:16).

4. (To the Apostles) "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; whose sins you

shall retain, they are retained" (John 20:21-23).

These texts and many others constitute a delegation of Christ's authority that is just as clear as God's delegations of parents to rule their children, of civil rulers to direct their subjects, of kings, priests and prophets to command His people in the Old Law.

The final phase of the argument that convinces Catholics that they cannot be true Christians without rendering obedience to the representatives of Christ in the world is that which answers the chief human objection to such obedience. All the opposition of outsiders to the system of obedience that makes Christ's Church what it is may be summed up in this: Men are fallible intellectually and prone to moral weakness. They can make mistakes and commit sins. Moreover members of the Catholic hierarchy have made mistakes and committed sins in the past. Therefore obedience to such as these is beneath the dignity of free men and cannot possibly be a demand of religion.

A Poor Excuse

It must be remarked at once that this argument, which is especially popular in a democratic nation, proves far more than its champions intend to prove. It proves, if it is correct, that never, under any circumstances, neither in the natural nor the Christian order, should obedience of one human being to another be insisted on. Children

need not obey their parents according to this, because their parents are intellectually fallible and often morally weak. Citizens need not obey their country's rulers, because these are weak and mortal men. Employees need not obey their employers because they are never paragons of all wisdom and moral integrity, etc. In short, if obedience to spiritual superiors is outlawed because they are men, by the same token obedience to any other human superior has no force as a law.

The main point is, however, that it is a matter of historical fact that Christ, who added this specific form of obedience to all the others that had been ordained by God from the beginning of time, took note of the argument of human frailty and did three things to destroy its forces.

"My Church"

First of all, He promised that He would use His divine power to prevent those entrusted with His teaching and commanding authority from leading His followers into error in any point of doctrine or morality. That He made such a promise is on record in the Bible: "...I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will never prevail against her" (Matthew 16:18). "He that heareth you, heareth me" (Luke 10:16). These would be idle and empty statements if they did not mean that Christ would permit no deviation from the truth He wanted the world to know to be effected by those whom He sent to preach it. And 1900 years of history have proved

that they were not idle words, for in all that time there has been no single instance of change in an essential doctrine promulgated by the Church, nor of an error officially taught that had to be corrected later on.

The second thing that Christ did to offset the argument of human frailty and weakness against obedience was to set the seal of miracles on those whom He raised up to represent Him in spiritual matters. The apostles worked hundreds of miracles, and right down to most recent times, miracles have occurred within the Church, even at times when her current leaders were not all they should have been, to prove that God is at hand wherever obedience is given to His representatives on earth.

The third thing that Christ did to answer beforehand the argument that human frailty on the part of spiritual superiors makes the notion of obedience repugnant and wrong was to issue most terrible threats against scandal-giving superiors, to warn His followers against taking scandal from them, and to assure them that in obedience, despite scandals, they would still find their salvation. He even allowed one scandal to break out before He died, in the person of Judas. Judas had been given authority to speak in His name with the other apostles, but of Judas, who fell, He said: "It were better for him had he never been born."

Most of the opposition to obedience comes from those who lose

sight of the power and the promise of Christ to bring about perfect justice and retribution among all men, no matter what positions they have held in this world. A worldly or sinful or proud ecclesiastic or pastor makes people gnash their teeth only because they forget that Christ misses nothing, He permits no evil to pass unnoticed and unrecorded, and He has all eternity in which to make men pay to the last farthing for their shortcomings and sins in this world. And He has given His word that His judgment on those who have been raised into positions of authority will be especially minute and severe.

To the Catholic, then, obedience to ecclesiastical superiors is obedience to God, no matter what kind of men the superiors may happen to be. Such a Catholic is not disturbed, more than momentarily, by the fact that a certain Pope or bishop or priest may not be perfect in wisdom nor exalted in sanctity; he knows that the merit of obedience arises from submitting to God's authority even when He has placed it in weak and fragile vessels. He knows that Christ has chosen to act and speak through His representatives on earth, that He does preserve them from deceiving His followers, and that He preserves those who obey them from confusion, darkness and error. In short, he simply takes Christ at His word when He said to His weak apostles and their successors: "He that heareth you heareth me."

Why Some People Do Not Become Catholics



The question implied in the above title is bound at times to come to the mind of many non-Catholics and most convinced and practicing Catholics.

A convinced and practicing Catholic is one who has studied, at least to some degree, the intellectual foundations of the Catholic religion and found them unassailable; who, utilizing the helping gifts held out to him by God, has made his submission to the one Church that represents the will of God and the means of salvation to all men; who, in living his faith to the best of his ability, finds peace, certainty about whither he is going in life and after death, and a measure of that joy which Christ promised to all His followers.

Without smugness or pride, such convinced and practicing Catholics want to see all other human beings enjoying the religious certainty, the hope and spiritual peace that are theirs. These things so completely satisfy their minds and their hearts that they cannot but wonder what it is that holds back so many people from embracing the one thing they most need.

The answer to the question is not simple. It involves all the various and complex factors that in any way influence human free will, already affected adversely by the inheritance of original sin, to reject God's helping graces and to turn away from the truth He has revealed.

Perhaps a study of these factors will help practicing Catholics to an intelligent exercise of zeal toward those who have not the true religion. It will show fallen-away Catholics what brought about their giving up of the most precious gift in the world. It may point out to non-Catholics something that they have been missing or neglecting in regard to the important business of saving their souls.

Loosely but practically speaking, we can distinguish four general reasons for failure on the part of non-Catholics to find and accept the true religion, which is embodied in the Catholic Church. We say "loosely speaking," because the four overlap in many instances, and because their relative importance may differ in different individual cases. We shall, nevertheless, treat of each one separately and in its various forms.

Some people do not become Catholics because they do not humbly ask for the gift of faith by prayer.

It would be easy, but wrong, to explain the fact that many people remain outside the true religion because God does not offer to all human beings the special help or the light and strength, to submit to the true religion. This would be wrong because it is contrary to many of the truths that God has revealed about His will for all mankind.

Men's Salvation

He has revealed, for example, that He wills and desires the salvation of all men. He has made it clear that He wants all to be saved by being united in the one true fold, under the one Shepherd, that is the Church He established on earth.

Now God never wills something to be done without providing the means by which the end can be attained. The principal means by which people become Catholics is the special help of God. That means God always holds it in readiness for men to receive it. Nobody will ever be able to say that he lost his soul and was condemned to hell because God willed it that way, or because God chose to deprive him of the gifts through which he could find and obey the truths revealed by God.

Despite the fact, however, that, in some historical instances, God's grace has seemed to overwhelm individuals and to sweep them as if

by miracle into His Church, it is true that in every case of conversion the individual involved must, at least in some general way, seek God's helping grace in order to receive it.

This seeking is done first and foremost *by prayer*. God's grace is a free gift, but it is given in accordance with the nature of the one to receive it. By nature man is free. Something of his freedom must play a part in readying him for God's help. His freedom thus acts when, even in darkness and ignorance and error and confusion, he cries out: "God, help me. God, give me *light* to know your will and the *strength* to fulfill it. God, give me strength to do what I must do to find the true religion by which I am to be saved."

Many non-Catholics, even with grave doubts and religious questionings in their minds, never become Catholics because they will not humble themselves to ask for the gift of faith that God holds ready for their souls.

Secularism

Some people do not become Catholics because they have become so wrapped up in the visible and material world around them that they say they have no time to give to thoughts of God and spiritual things.

This reason for not becoming a Catholic may be summed up in one modern word—secularism. The word "secularism" derives from the Latin word "saeculum," which means "the world," and is defined

as so great an attachment to the desirable things of this present world that all real interest in religious and eternal values is smothered in one's heart.

A great many people never give themselves time to think of such questions as the following: "Is there a true religion that God wants me to practice; is it important to find the true religion, etc.?" Not that these questions never arise in their minds at all; man is a spiritual being, and questions about spiritual things are bound to come to him at times. But the secularist smothers them by activity concerned with things that he can touch and see and feel. In the apt figure used by Christ, the seed of religious truth is sown in his heart, but "it is choked by the cares and riches of this world."

The Unreligious

Usually such people have no religion at all, and they can quote at length the words of scoffers against all religion, like Voltaire and Ingersoll and Bertrand Russell, etc. This is all in self-defense. Their religion is their business, their money, their pleasures, their love affairs, their eating and drinking. They know there should be more to life than these things; inevitably they realize at times that they are missing something and will pay for their worldliness in the end. But they go on from day to day fighting off such ideas and plunging themselves more and more deeply into the affairs of the world. And the one thing that they fear and oppose more than anything else is

the thought that perhaps they should look into the Catholic religion. That is because they know instinctively that the Catholic religion is directly opposed to their all-out service of the world.

Sometimes people who are prevented from looking into the Catholic religion by reason of their secularism do practice some form of religion. But it is a kind of religion that does not greatly tax their energies or limit their enjoyment of this world. It lets them make their own laws and choose their own beliefs. It has little to do with the religion Christ founded and perpetuates in His Church through the words, "If any man would come after Me, let him take up his cross daily and follow Me."

It is difficult, let it be added, to approach a secularist with the idea of looking into the claims of the Catholic Church on his allegiance. He "smothers" the idea quickly. It is only when great sorrow comes to him and the world's joy has suddenly crumbled like ashes in his hands, that he may listen when you say: "You need God, and His Church, and His loving yoke." Meanwhile he can and must always be prayed for.

Barrier of Sin

Some people do not become Catholics because of some very specific sin that prevents their admission to the Church as long as they will not renounce it.

This reason, above all others, works two ways. It keeps people from becoming Catholics, and it very often leads Catholics to give

up the practice of their faith.

The sad thing about this obstacle to becoming a Catholic is the fact that many of those who cannot hurdle it have strong leanings toward the Catholic Church or the beginnings of an intellectual conviction that it represents the one true religion. They are the ones who often make statements like this: "I would readily become a Catholic, if only the Catholic Church would change its stand on the one sin I cannot give up."

Marriage Problems

At the head of the list of sins that keep individuals from becoming Catholics are those that have something to do with marriage. Every active priest has met a large number of persons who have been divorced and married a second time, who are eager to become Catholics but only on the condition that the Church permit them (as it never can) to keep their second and unlawful spouse.

Some are so naive as to think that the Church is looking for members on any terms. They say to a priest: "Surely you have some way of fixing up my second marriage, and I'll become a Catholic as soon as you do so." They do not realize that the Catholic Church has never compromised with the words of Christ to the effect that attempted marriage after divorce is wrong. Such people can be forgiven through the mercy of Christ and admitted into the Church, but only after their sinful state has been given up.

Others don't become Catholics because they are committed to some

habitual sin. Here again, many of these people like everything about the Catholic religion except her prohibition of their pet sin. They like its appeal to the intellect; its fulfillment of the words of Christ used in establishing it; its unity through the centuries and around the world; its sacraments and sacramentals and official public worship; its promises of everlasting life. But all this they give up because they want one thing that it cannot and will not permit.

Someone has said, rightly we think, that millions of people would apply for instructions and admission to the Catholic Church tomorrow, if tomorrow the morning papers were to carry the story that the Catholic Church would no longer demand of its followers fidelity in marriage, the right use of marriage and resistance to all the forms of impurity that are popular or common in the world.

Conspirators

Some people do not become Catholics because many have conspired to keep them away from the Church and no one has taken the trouble to lead them to it.

As was said above, God wants all human beings to be saved, and He wants them all to be saved through the one Church He founded to distribute the merits of His passion and death and to teach all nations to the end of time. From this truth the conclusion must be drawn that God wants some human beings to act as instruments in bringing His true religion to others.

He said to His very first follow-

ers: "Teach all nations whatsoever I have commanded you . . . You shall be witnesses to Me . . . I have sent you that you bring forth fruit . . . that there may be one fold and one shepherd."

We shall not try here to make impossibly fine distinctions as to just how guilty Catholics are in not carrying out Our Lord's words, nor as to how free from guilt in the eyes of God are non-Catholics who stay out of the Catholic Church because of lack of opportunity to learn about it, or because of the neglect and sins of Catholics. But this much can surely be set down: Many people have never thought of becoming Catholics because what is in their minds about the Catholic Church is totally different from what the Catholic Church really is. And for the distorted views of many, Catholics are in some way to blame.

Three things contribute to the forming of false notions about the Catholic Church in the minds of non-Catholics, or to keeping them away from it.

Misinformed

The first is constant *misinformation* or *miseducation*. There are those who have been brought up from childhood on an educational diet of untruths about the Catholic Church. They actually believe what they have been told many times, and still read in anti-Catholic pamphlets: For example, that Catholics adore the Virgin Mary, or at least place her in a position of higher honor than Christ Himself; that priests make no effort to ob-

serve the celibacy that they have vowed, but use it as a screen for corrupting others; that money can buy the annulment of any marriage from the Catholic Church, or, indeed, any other favor; that the doctrine of purgatory was invented for the sole purpose of getting money out of Catholics for the release of their loved ones, etc.

Only God, with His infinite wisdom, can actually judge how blameless are people for accepting these obvious lies. Experience proves that many of them seem to be blameless; they have, in the circles in which they moved, heard nothing but such things about the Catholic Church. And Catholics may not have made sufficient efforts to penetrate those circles with the truth.

Bad Example

The second thing that contributes to hardened opposition to the Catholic religion is *scandal on the part of Catholics* when they act contrary to the Church's teaching. Logically, the evil committed by a member of the Church neither proves nor disproves the truth of the Church. But the evil things that some Catholics do have a profound psychological effect on the minds of non-Catholics, especially when prejudiced notions such as the above have already been implanted in those minds.

Thus it happens that, if they happen to come into contact with profane Catholics, or gossiping Catholics, or superstitious Catholics, or intemperate Catholics, or Catholics who are unfaithful to their marriage vows, they become

more and more confirmed in their feeling that the Catholic religion is a religion of hypocrisy, and therefore one that deserves no consideration from them. Wrongly but understandably they identify the Church with some of its weakest members, and of course, find it wanting. They shut their eyes to the force of the argument in favor of the Church that comes from the lives of its saints, or even from the lives of good, faithful, average Catholics in the world around them.

Only God can rightly judge when the scandalous actions of some Catholics are used merely as a pretext by non-Catholics for closing their eyes to the claims of the Church on their allegiance, and when such scandals carry sufficient weight to leave them in good faith in their ignorance of the true religion. But this much is certain: Catholics who contribute, by their evil lives, to keeping anybody outside the true Church, will one day be judged far more severely than they anticipate for holding back the cause of Christ. "It needs be," said Christ, "that scandals will come. But woe to him by whom the scandals come."

The Uninformed

The third thing that contributes to holding down the number of converts to the true religion is *failure on the part of Catholics to provide opportunities for non-Catholics to learn about it*. There are many non-Catholics in the world who hold nothing against the Catholic religion; who have not been taken in by the propaganda they have heard against it; who have a

half-conscious but constant desire for the certainty, the security, the truth, the solid hope, that the Catholic Church could bring them.

This we know by the fact that so many converts to the Catholic religion complain that, if only someone had pointed out the way to the true Church long before, they would not have had to wait so long to find the truth. There are many thousands still waiting. They need only some Catholic to invite them to Catholic services or instructions; some Catholic to talk to them in a friendly fashion about what they need and what they are missing; some Catholic to offer them reading matter that will answer their preliminary questions, and stir up the desire to know more and more about the religion through which God wants them to be transformed and to be saved.

Obstacles

Thus there are six types of non-Catholics who have as yet made no move toward finding the true religion. Each can be identified by a phrase or a word, and each can be addressed with a few words that represent the spirit in which the zealous Catholic approaches his non-Catholic friends when an opportunity is offered.

1. *The non-praying non-Catholic.* "More than arguments and evidence, more than proofs and demonstrations, you need God's help to find the true religion. That help has been promised *if you pray*. If you do not pray, you may come to see the truth shining as brightly as the sun, and yet be unable to

accept it and live by it.”

2. *The secularistic non-Catholic.* “All that you are living for is passing; only God and His truth remain constant and worthwhile. Don’t wait till old age enfeebles you, and death is approaching you, to care for your immortal soul. *It may be too late.*”

3. *The sinful non-Catholic.* “Every human being’s life is a choice between heaven and hell. By permitting a serious sin to stand between you and the true religion, you are deliberately choosing hell. And what are you getting for your choice? A few swift years of having your forbidden pleasures, which themselves will turn to ashes before you die and enter hell.”

4. *The misinformed non-Catholic.* “You must now and then have doubts as to whether the terrible things you have been taught about the Catholic Church are true. Those

doubts can be resolved. Present them to informed persons on the inside of the Catholic Church; don’t listen only to what is said by those who are outside and against it.”

5. *The victims of scandal given by Catholics.* “Christ bore with Judas Iscariot amongst His first twelve, and the sins of Judas did not disprove His divinity to the other eleven, nor even to Judas himself. Don’t let a modern Judas, nor a hundred Judases, deprive you of Christ, nor of membership in His mystical body that is His Church.”

6. *The unapproached non-Catholic.* “Let this be an approach to you. Christ is waiting for you; His Church is waiting for you. Smother your fears and misgivings. Ask a Catholic friend to take you to a priest. All that you have ever truly wanted will be given you with the true religion.”

The Prayer of Christ for His Church on the night He was betrayed.

“Not for them only do I pray, but for them also who shall believe in me, that they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou hast given me, I have given them, that they may be one, as we also are one: I in them and thou in me; that they may be made perfect in one, and the world may know that thou hast sent me, and has loved them as thou hast also loved me.” *John 17:20-23*

WHY SOME PEOPLE QUIT GOING TO CHURCH

There is *nothing* more tragic in this world than to see a man who has lost the gift of faith, unless it is to see one who still has the faith but refuses to practice it.

Catholic priests meet them frequently and they always go into the same routine: a long explanation of the reason why they don't go to church any more, always ending with a note of self-justification and with the presumption that God understands and will let them into heaven by a side gate.

We know that their conscience is bothering them, that they are trying to quiet the inner voice that tells them they are wrong. We listen to their illogical arguments, we pity them and pray for them to receive the grace of humility. Seldom do we try to convince them that their curtain of pride cannot be pierced by words; but we know the fire of faith is not dead. A tiny flame is burning amongst the embers of their scorched and overweening self-esteem.

It is interesting to study the various types.

Here is a man from a good family with a background of Catholic edu-



cation. For years he attended to his religious duties but slowly his fervor cooled and he quit going to church. Why?

Ask him and he may start putting the blame on the priest. His pastor was always asking for money, or the priest scolded him in the confessional, or he disagreed

with the way the pastor ran the parish, or perhaps some priest was guilty of a human deflection, and he poses as though he were scandalized.

Such a man fails to realize that the Catholic Church has a divine origin but is administered by human beings. His heart is full of pride, and he has an exalted opinion of his own excellence and talents. Argue with such a one and you get nowhere. He will "clam up" or become abusive and angry; yet he knows he is wrong, and in his heart he is convinced of the truth of the Church. He won't join another religious sect but he will become just another lapsed Catholic.

Then there is the man who has a variety of gripes about the Church. He doesn't like the Church's atti-

tude on integration or mixed marriage or labor unions. He can't understand why the bishop has to have a new cathedral. He claims that he finds more kindness amongst non-Catholics than he does amongst his own Catholic brethren. He expects every priest to be a stellar example of every virtue and will countenance no imperfections.

Strangely he will never criticize the Catholic nun adversely and he has nothing but respect for the Catholic brother who pinned his ears back in high school, but he will strain at every gnat of imperfection in his fellow Catholics, forgetting that they are human and can commit sin. He takes out his feigned grudge on the Church by quitting Holy Mass and the sacraments, yet he still wants to be known as a Catholic just in case of a sudden sickness or accident, you know . . .

Sinful Practice

Such a person cannot be reached by argument nor is he satisfied if one agrees with him. Actually what he is doing is throwing up a smoke screen. He quit going to church and the sacraments, but it wasn't because of any of the faults he finds with the Church and Catholics. The real reason was that he started practicing birth-prevention and was refused absolution because he refused to stop it.

To find fault with the Church and the faith is a way of dulling his conscience and vindicating himself; yet in his heart he knows the Church is right and is still the holy mystical body of Christ.

A woman, for example, foolishly married a man who was no good, a drunkard and a wastrel. She knew it before she married him but thought she could convert him; instead of reforming, he became worse. Now she is angry with God because God won't take him in death and give her the freedom she desires. So, she gives up going to Mass and the sacraments, but she hasn't lost the faith. Let her get seriously sick and she calls for the priest; but meanwhile she thinks she is getting even with God for not making things work out the way she wants them to be.

Mixed Marriage

Or maybe a Catholic girl marries a non-Catholic against the advice of priest, parents, and people. After he has given her two or three children, the man leaves her and marries another. She quits going to Church. Why? Not because she has lost the faith but because God won't do what she wants. Oh, she doesn't want her husband back again, but it would be so nice if he were out of the way so she could marry again, validly and in the Church. Eventually she does marry again—out of the Church—and then she loses the faith entirely.

Most priests who were chaplains in the service are familiar with the GI who has quit going to Church and the sacraments. His record shows that he is a Catholic but the Padre never sees him at Mass. Ask him why and he may say:

"I got too much religion in the parochial school. The priest and the nuns were always running us to

church and ramming religion down my throat."

Such statements are so many words that give no indication of the true reason why he quit going to Mass and the sacraments. It may be because he wants to appear rough and tough to his GI buddies; or it may be that he has met a non-Catholic girl and is trying to make an impression on her.

Most of the time it is because he is living in sin. He is away from home and family and now he is just another service man in a strange place; he begins to experiment with sin and doesn't want to stop because it is pleasant and thrilling and he has plenty to talk about when he and his fellow GIs get together and "shoot the breeze." His conscience bothers him but he can stifle it and build up his ego by letting everyone know he can get along without religion. He even boasts about it and substitutes a devotion to the service to take the place of his devotion to God.

Lax Catholics

But let him get into a tight spot or let him get wounded in battle and then he wants a priest. Strangely, too, such is the kind that is always coming to the chaplain for some kind of favor, for a transfer, an extra furlough or for help for the folks at home.

We know, too, of the lax Catholic who will renounce basic principles of his faith to obtain a promotion in his business or to gather in lucrative contracts or to smooth over some great failure in his life. There is little hope for him except through

the miracle of prayer. The same holds for a Catholic who marries a non-Catholic before a minister and joins a non-Catholic sect.

Those we pity, though, are they who still have a spark of faith but who don't want to make any sacrifices for the faith. Some are just too proud. Years ago perhaps, in a fit of anger or jealousy or through negligence or bad company they quit going to church; in time they realized their mistake. Now they hunger for God and the sacraments but they are too proud to admit they are wrong. To compensate they give to charity, they argue for the authority of the Church and defend her against her enemies; they even advise others to do what is right but pride keeps them from coming back to the faith they love.

Hard to Convince

Likewise worthy of sympathy are they who have had little formal education and yet demand that every dogma be proved by reason to the satisfaction of their undeveloped intellects. Such always want to argue religion. They are not like the non-Catholics who accept the Bible and the Bible alone for their norm of belief; what they want is cold reason even to explain mysteries like the Holy Trinity, and because every article of faith cannot be proved by reason and reason alone they quit going to church. Actually they haven't lost the faith but their pride keeps them from loving it.

Then there are those who measure the faith by a material yardstick. If they prosper and have com-

forts and security they go to church and even pose as strong Catholic leaders in their parishes. But let adversity come, or poverty, and they quit going to church, give up the sacraments and sadly, too often turn against God. Yet they know what they need most is the sacraments. Their faith is not entirely dead and for them there is hope.

A few so-called Catholics quit going to church because they want to go fishing or play golf every Sunday or want to work to make more money. Their excuse is that they can pray and adore God on the golf course or in a boat as well as they can in church. The fact is that, even if they could, they don't, and they fail to realize that the Church has clearly and definitely told us how we must adore God and keep the third commandment and that is by attending Holy Mass every Sunday and holy day.

Eventually these lapsed Catholics come back to the practice of their faith; they get tired of fishing or too old to play golf and they finally get enough money for what they want and they come back home to God. Sometimes it happens during a mission when they have a chance to think and pray; often it happens as a result of prayer and good example from their family; many times after a siege of serious sickness they become changed men.

A great danger for many is that they will forget the truth that, though God freely gave them the gift of faith, its preservation is dependent in large part on their own actions once they have grown to maturity. There are three things

that may be called indispensable to the preservation of faith; if any one of them is neglected, faith may easily be lost.

1. The first means of preserving faith is that of prayer. All graces, in our adult lives, come to us through prayer. The greatest of all graces is the power to believe all that God has revealed. God may have given that power freely in baptism but He will not continue to uphold it in a person who does not pray. Experience confirms this abundantly; those who give up the practice of frequent prayer invariably find their faith weakening until at last it may be lost.

2. The second means necessary to the preservation of faith is fidelity to what it commands. Deliberate, habitual, mortal sins frequently end in a loss of faith. It is not hard to understand why. Sin is a direct insult to Almighty God, on whose good pleasure faith depends. God is all-merciful, of course, and for one sin or even several sins does not usually permit a person's faith to die. But when He is offended again and again, when a person's life is built around a habit of mortal sin, God frequently withdraws His graces from that person, and the sad result is a loss of faith.

3. The third important means of preserving faith is the use of the mind to understand its reasonable foundations and its essential teachings. Faith is built upon reason, and the more a person studies its motives, its bases, its logical connections, its applications to life, the stronger will faith become. No matter what a person's education may

be, he is bound to use his mind in some way, e.g., by listening to sermons, by reading, by asking questions, etc. Many people lose their faith simply *through culpable ignorance*; they give it up as something unreasonable because they have been too slothful or busy with other things to learn how unanswerably reasonable it is.

Hence, if anyone finds his faith becoming more or less shaky, it will be well for him to examine whether he is neglecting one of these means. Any one of them—even apart from the others—can gradually lead a Catholic into the sorry ranks of “fallen aways.” And that means the loss of the highest gift God can ever give to man.

In pragmatic America, where most things are measured in terms of their dollar value, a frequent question is this: “Does it pay to be good?” Also a frequent comment is this: “I was good for a long time, but what did I get out of it?” A third attitude is expressed in the words: “Why should I be good, when evil and irreligious people seem to be the ones who prosper?” This calls for clear thinking about the rewards that should be looked for in life.

1. The only reward with which true Christians should be concerned is that which Christ has promised them in heaven. That reward is so rich, so wonderful, so unending, so vast, that it is worth the price of any amount of suffering here in this world. Our Lord promised that there would be suffering for those who want the only perfect reward of heaven. He never

promised that being good would make them rich, or spare them from sickness, bereavement and other trials of life on earth. At the same time, however, He did assure them that the suffering asked of them would never be too much for them to bear, and that peace of heart would always be theirs if they recognized His hand in sending the suffering.

2. There is such a thing as an earthly reward for those who choose to ignore and reject the reward of heaven by ignoring and rejecting the authority and rights of God. No man is so utterly evil that he does none of the things that are deserving of at least a tiny reward. Thus it will be noticed that some people have a very smooth and prosperous time of it in this world, even though they are fundamentally irreligious and even scornful of many of God's laws. They are being paid here on earth for whatever good things they have ever done; but heaven is lost to them and they will suffer forever in hell unless there be complete repentance and reform for their sins before death. Our Lord Himself revealed this when He said to some of the godless rich of His own day: “Woe to you rich, for you have your reward.”

The true Christian, therefore, should never be jealous of the good times and prosperous years enjoyed by people who pay little attention to God and His laws. Such persons are to be pitied and prayed for. They are being paid off in full for the little good they have done in this world; in eternity they will be paid off in full for their evil.

HOW TO COME BACK TO THE CHURCH



Possibly there is no grief so deep and painful to a Catholic heart as the daily consciousness that a close relative or friend no longer lives up to the practice of his Catholic faith.

In a fervent home there are so many reminders of the infidelity of the beloved; when the family goes to church, there is a constant heartache over an empty place in the pew; as a mother says her rosary, there is heartbreak with every prayer; as a father reads his prayerbook, there is a nagging sense of shame over the thought that any of his own could be unfaithful to his religion. "What have I done to cause this failure?"

Such is the complaint that fairly often is heard from the lips of a distraught parent. The death of a dear one is sometimes much easier to bear than the constant knowledge that a son or daughter, brother or sister, father or mother, is walking the earth spiritually dead, in danger of being condemned to hell.

What every Catholic should remember is that Baptism leaves an indelible mark on the soul that will brand a person a Christian forever,

even to the joys of heaven or the pains of hell. A Catholic who has lapsed from his faith through his own fault can only be a very bad Catholic.

It is safe to say that a Catholic who really understands his religion and whose judgment is not clouded by prejudice or passion, hardly ever renounces it with the conviction

that it is false and that some other form of belief represents the one true church of Christ. That accounts for the fact that Catholics who give up the practice of their faith seldom, except for motives of sheer expediency, affiliate with any other religion.

For some who fall away, there may be at least a partially excusing cause in the fact that they were never very well instructed in their religion and consequently never really appreciated its true meaning and value.

Then, too, there are those who, through no fault of their own, were prevented from a normal practice of their faith, until they just gradually drifted away. Under this category are frequently to be found sailors in the merchant marine, workmen whose occupation de-

mands abnormal hours, and people who live in a locality where there is seldom an opportunity to assist at Mass or receive the sacraments.

There is also a surprisingly large group who were baptized as infants, but for various reasons were never brought up in the Catholic religion. These, of course, cannot morally be classified as fallen-aways. Shocking, also, is the number of unbaptized children of Catholic parents who have themselves lapsed from the faith. These truly are suffering, unknowingly perhaps, from the sins of their elders.

Most often the case history of an apostate Catholic reveals that it was a worldly and unworthy motive that induced him to give up his faith. Passion, anger, greed, ambition, pride, sloth, lust and gluttony frequently lie at the root of the defection of a "soul that once was devout, but is now a stranger to its God."

A Poor Start

Thus the case of Mary: All through school and college she was a devout Catholic girl. For her the chances of a good marriage were very bright until she somehow fell under the charms of a divorced man. She was too deeply enmeshed, by the time she decided to talk to a priest, to give him up. There could be no ceremony before God, because her intended was still a married man. So they went before a judge, and Mary, much to her dread and unhappiness, has been barred from Holy Communion to this day.

Then there is Janice: After high school she decided to go to a non-Catholic college. Her parents, who at best were only nominal Catholics, made no dissent. During her freshman year she felt the coldness of classrooms without prayer and of companions who were unconcerned about religion; in fact, she was at times not a little annoyed at evident falsehoods uttered about her religion. After a while, in the absence of religious atmosphere and instruction, Janice grew lukewarm and callous. Then she became an easy prey for a clever young professor who by half-truths and fallacious innuendoes made her ashamed of her faith.

The Dollar Sign

Although twenty-five, Tom is a major problem to his parents. After graduation from a Catholic high school Tom secured a good job, but within a year or two, he began to come home drunk. From that time on, Tom was more or less out of work. Naturally his father and mother were disappointed, but that was not the cause of their main concern. For several months now Tom has ceased receiving the sacraments, and finally has given up Mass. The boy has evidently got mixed up with the wrong crowd, or the wrong girl. Mortal sin has dulled his conscience and warped his appreciation of moral and spiritual values.

Unfortunately Isabel has entered a mixed marriage. Not long after the ceremony the young wife discovered, to her dismay, that if she would keep her husband, she would

have to compromise her moral principles and her faith. So compromise she did, until there was no religion left in her household. Sunday became a pagan holiday, and her children have grown up without benefit of baptism, Mass or prayer.

A Heavy Price

If a fallen-away Catholic has any conscience left, he cannot be happy, for he has no peace in his soul in his innermost being. Possibly that is why there is little joy in this world comparable to that of one who has returned after long years spent in the darkness and dismay of sin. Sometimes it is only in the privacy of the confessional, with the priest and God as silent witnesses, that the tears of relief and gratitude flow unrestrained, from strong men as well as frail women who have strayed from grace.

The life of every apostate is pitiable because of wasted years that might have stored up treasures in heaven and brought great good to others. The deliberately lapsed Catholic cannot be such without grievous sin against God and his continued estrangement from God usually makes his burden of guilt heavier and heavier. He is still bound by the laws of the Church, and there is a new mortal sin each time he eats meat on Friday, misses Mass on Sunday, or omits his Easter Communion.

Resistance Wanes

Then, too, the chances are that, with his constant rejection of God's constant help, there will be fre-

quent violation of the ten commandments, ever plunging him deeper into the state of hostility to God. After a time the faint flicker of faith burns out, conscience is crushed into insensitivity, and ability to appreciate the moral and spiritual is coarsened and stultified. He walks the earth as a man already condemned in the eyes of God, because his soul is dead.

Worst of all, a Catholic can hardly ever cease the practice of his religion without doing immense harm to others. His bad example is a constant scandal to all who knew him in the days of his fidelity or who have since learned of his past. Then there are those of his own family circle whom he frequently drags into infidelity with him. Thus a husband and wife who fall away so often rear their children as pagans, and in this way bring upon themselves the guilt of an entire family line that is lost to the faith.

Death comes to the apostate just as inevitably as to the faithful, and just as suddenly and unexpectedly at times. As far as salvation is concerned, most people die just as they have lived. If they have spent most of their years in mortal sin, they won't be different in death! If they have struggled to keep their souls in grace, they will persevere. According to the saints, a death-bed conversion is often suspect, because there would be no purpose of amendment, if death were still far away. In this, however, it is only God who knows the true dispositions of the human heart. So often, too, when a fallen-away is dying,

the priest is summoned at the last minute, only to arrive too late; or, it sometimes happens as a direct result of one's infidelity, that a priest is not notified at all.

Unhappy End

And so it frequently happens with a fallen-away Catholic. As the years go by, time runs out and so does his allotment of God's offered help and opportunities to win heaven. Last minute conversions are possible, of course, but it takes the extraordinary help of God to bring them about.

For a person who has turned away from the Catholic Church and wants to come back, the first thing to do is *to pray*. Although a person habitually opposed to God cannot merit anything for heaven, it is possible by fervent supplication to win God's help in conversion and a good confession. Prayer, especially to the Blessed Mother, who always has an anxious care for the wayward, will secure those supernatural helps from God necessary for the courage, confidence and sorrow to make one's peace with God.

Lost Sheep Returns

As far as the Church is concerned, it is very easy for most fallen-aways to come back, but it may be quite a struggle on the individual's part after years and years of loose or careless living, to be again a practical Catholic. People living in an invalid marriage that cannot be rectified, especially where children are involved, are the saddest cases of all.

Of all his apostolic activities, the priest, like his Master, finds keenest satisfaction in welcoming back a sheep that has strayed from the fold. For that reason he will always be kind and helpful. Most fallen-away Catholics dread a long confession, but it is surprising how quickly, barring impediments, a sinner with the proper dispositions can be restored to the state of friendship with God. Ordinarily, it takes only a few minutes, but if the fallen-away has incurred an excommunication or is involved in a marriage that can be validated, there will, understandably, be some delay before he can be absolved.

The Road Back

As to confession, there are two things that the lapsed Catholic must do: 1) make a reasonably thorough examination of conscience; 2) be certain that he has a *genuine*, complete and truly Christian sorrow, with a *firm* purpose of amendment, at least for his mortal sins. Naturally, it may be impossible to remember, after long years, the exact number of times or even some important circumstances of his sins, but God will be satisfied if he gives the approximate number and tries to be *honest* in the telling. Then if he is sincere in his sorrow and amendment, and does not make any exceptions, even if his regret proceeds only from fear of hell, his confession will be good. Ordinarily, if the penitent requests it, the priest will ask the questions necessary to insure the telling of all the serious sins that were committed. This is a great relief to those who fear

they might be forgetting something important.

As for those who have grown complacent in their apostasy, sometimes it takes a terrific jolt to shake them out of their dangerous lethargy. Occasionally the sudden death of a close relative or friend may do it; at other times a serious accident or a severe illness. But probably more fallen-away Catholics are brought back to the communion of the faithful by making a parish mission than by any other means. By forcefully calling attention to the eternal truths—the purpose of life, death, judgment, heaven or hell, and the mercy of God—the missionary can, at such times of grace, put into complacent souls the fear of the Lord that is necessary for their return to grace and salvation. But it is to be feared that the vast majority of sinners who are satisfied with their state will neither approach a Catholic mission nor do anything to free themselves from their sloth. It may be that they have no one praying for them, and they have squandered all the ordinary and extraordinary helping graces allotted to them by God.

Most Catholics who have come back to the sacraments after long absence, will tell you that all their fears and dread of confession were groundless. In fact, it was very easy, they will admit, once they got started. Regardless of the struggle and sacrifice, however, they will invariably add that the peace and happiness they regained with a right conscience were worth it.

Notes: If a fallen-away has in-

curred the penalty of excommunication, but is properly disposed for absolution, the priest will secretly obtain from ecclesiastical authorities, with no mention of names, the needed faculty for absolving from the censure. This, except in danger of death, may occasion delay.

If a person is involved in an attempted marriage that cannot possibly be rectified in the eyes of God, ordinarily there is no way of returning to the sacraments except by separation from the partner in adultery. Such an unfortunate one, however, should by all means have a talk with a priest, and should keep on praying and attending Mass for the intention of being granted the grace to make the separation.

If a person is married outside the Church, but in a union that can possibly be validated by a priest, then as soon as possible the Catholic should go to his pastor about it. This should be done even when—say—a non-Catholic partner refuses to have the marriage blessed by the Church. It can sometimes be rectified even though one's partner refuses to see the priest.

As to those who have left the Church largely because they were poorly informed, it is often advantageous for them, when they do return, to take an ordinary course of instruction. This is absolutely necessary for people who were baptized in infancy but not reared as Catholics, or those born of fallen-away parents. Surprising it is how often such people have an inclination towards the Church and somehow find their way into it.

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