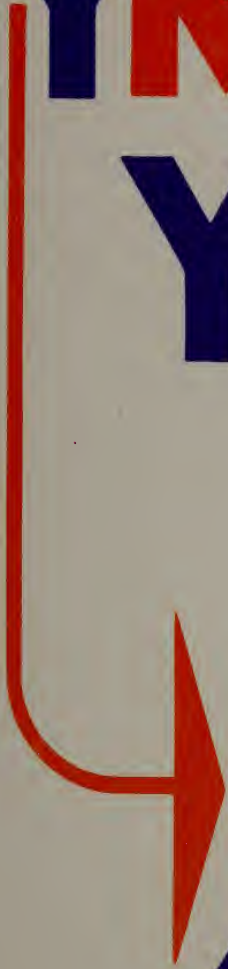


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Y.M.C.A.—Y.W.C.A. NOT FOR CATHOLICS

BY REV. DR. L. RUMBLE M.S.C.

The Young Men's Christian Association has a most attractive title for anyone to whom Christ means anything at all; and it is out to attract, first and foremost, all Protestant young men who believe in Him, to assist in the promotion of His cause and to help evangelize mankind.

But it also welcomes other young men, for the good influence it hopes to have upon them, whether these young men belong to the Eastern Orthodox Churches, or to the Catholic Church, or to the Jewish religion. In India and Asia and other such countries it can even find room for Moslems and Buddhists. In fact, a spokesman of the "World Alliance" recently declared that the Y.M.C.A. must regard "as its parish" the 400 million young men throughout the world.

In the Y.M.C.A., then, we are confronted with a world-wide movement; one truly international, and already numbering millions of adherents. And continuously, now here, now there, it is conducting drives in order still further to increase its membership. Moreover, it is generally held in the greatest esteem. It is very popular in high places, often in ecclesiastical circles, almost always in civic headquarters. In 1955 the Australian Government even issued a special commemorative postage stamp in honor of the Y.M.C.A. Centenary, to travel with Australian mail to all parts of the globe as a public and almost international tribute to its services to mankind.

It would seem a shame to introduce even a mildly discordant note into such a symphony of well-nigh universal praise. But since the Y.M.C.A.'s bid for membership aims at sweeping Catholics also into its ranks, it is absolutely necessary to

get things into their right perspective; or, as is sometimes said, to "get the record straight." Our Catholic young men have a very definite obligation to ask whether this Association, originated outside their church and professing to be a Christian enterprise, can be brought into harmony with Catholic principles; and whether they themselves can, with a good conscience, enroll under its banner.

The problem is an exceedingly difficult one, and no merely superficial treatment can provide a worth-while solution of it. Confusions and ambiguities abound, and these must be clarified at all costs. Many Catholics have seen no harm in their joining the Y.M.C.A. Multitudes have indeed done so. They have seen the good work the "Y" is accomplishing in so many fields. They are aware that many of their fellow-citizens, not themselves members of it, support it from motives of civic devotedness. And they have felt that, somehow or other, they would be churlish and lacking in civic goodwill, if they did not follow such an inspiring example.

But is there any latent danger to the faith of individual Catholics who join it? And in supporting it, are they unwittingly supporting an Organization which has wrought untold harm to the Catholic Church and will go on doing such harm as long as it exists by the very fact that it is what it is? Have those Catholics who already belong to it really been misguided, through failure to look into these matters? At any rate, let us look into them now.

To get the Catholic point of view in regard to the Y.M.C.A. it will be necessary to outline briefly its history, to discuss its true nature, to try to locate the precise point of danger to Catholics, if any; and to analyze official utterances of the Church concerning it. The subject, as I have said, is a complicated one; and what is written in this booklet—not unsympathetically—needs to be considered in its entirety, without

isolating this or that passage from it.

The conclusions, however, will be very definite and clear for all who wish to see the Y.M.C.A. just as it is in terms of the principles of the Catholic religion; and the path to be followed will be unmistakable for those Catholics of goodwill who desire above all else to be true to their Faith.

History of the Y.M.C.A.

Indirectly the origin of the Y.M.C.A. can be traced to America, and to what is known as the "Great Awakening" during the latter half of the 18th century. The years that followed the arrival of the "Pilgrim Fathers" saw a sad decline in godly discipline and the growth of widespread spiritual laxity. But from 1725 onwards, and throughout the ensuing fifty years, religious revivals swept through the States, resulting in a wave of evangelical enthusiasm. A second phase of this revivalism arose in the early 1800's, and American evangelists began to visit England to dispense some of their fervor there.

It was in London, at a revivalist meeting conducted by the American evangelist Charles Finney, that an earnest young Englishman named George Williams experienced a profound interior conversion. He worked in a drapery firm, and with his new religious outlook at once became an apostle among his fellow employees, persuading them to assemble in his rooms for prayer-meetings and Bible study.

Workers from other firms were later invited to attend, and soon the idea of extending the plan led to the formation of a "Young Men's Christian Association" by twelve pioneers, on June 6th, 1844. The declared purpose of the members was "to influence young men to spread the Redeemer's kingdom among those by whom they are surrounded"; and from the

outset the Association was characterized by intense religious zeal to win young men for Christ.

Within seven years the movement had taken root in various countries on the Continent of Europe and had also spread to U.S.A. where it expanded rapidly, although there it tended to develop along lines often very different from those of the parent Association. So extraordinary was the growth of the organization that in 1855 an International Conference could be held in Paris, with representatives from England, Belgium, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, the United States and Canada in attendance; and at that Conference there was adopted what is known as the "Paris Basis" of all Y.M.C.A. foundations:

"The Young Men's Christian Associations seek to unite those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Savior, according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be His disciples in their doctrine and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of His Kingdom among young men."

After the Paris Conference truly astonishing progress occurred in U.S.A. during the next thirty years. Under the first city Secretary in New York, Robert McBurney, model premises were built which paved the way for over a thousand such buildings in America alone and properties worth millions of dollars today. Owing to the greater financial resources there available social activities could be there extended beyond anything possible in Europe; and these were more and more emphasized.

The scope of the Y.M.C.A. was thus broadened, and the American movement adopted the symbol of the triangle to signify the Association's aim to cater for the whole man, "spirit, mind and body." But to many the American way seemed a departure from the original purpose of the founder

of the Society, George Williams, who had intended, primarily at least, the religious and spiritual welfare of young men; and Conference after Conference in U.S.A. had to recall the members to this primary purpose, insisting that catering for intellectual, recreational and other needs of young men were to be regarded as secondary to that, and undertaken solely as a means towards promoting it.

John R. Mott

One of the most influential promoters of Y.M.C.A. work in America was John R. Mott. As a Methodist student at Cornell University, he had been converted at a revivalist meeting conducted there by evangelist J. K. Studd, in 1882. Thenceforward he made practically his life-work devotion to the spiritual welfare of students generally, and to foreign missionary undertakings.

After his graduation in 1888, he became General Secretary of the "Student Y.M.C.A.," and chairman of the "Student Voluntary Movement for Foreign Missions." Later on, he became General Secretary in U.S.A. for the "International Committee of the Y.M.C.A., which had been formed at Geneva, Switzerland, in 1878.

John R. Mott was truly a remarkable man. His personal life was one of exemplary Christian virtue, whilst his zeal for the welfare of souls and the energy with which he gave himself to the cause of Christ as he understood it to be could not but deserve the highest admiration of all without exception. Had he had the Catholic Faith he might have become another Francis Xavier.

Endowed with a foresight equal to his personal devotedness, he realized from the first the importance of the student world, and at Cornell had persuaded men from every Protestant denomination to join his "Student Y.M.C.A." From that

he went on to the organizing of Student Departments of the "Y" in all non-Catholic Universities, Colleges and Theological Seminaries. Meeting with reluctance on the part of many Lutheran and Episcopalian Institutions, he brought German and English religious leaders to the United States to work among them and overcome opposition, and their efforts met with unprecedented success. He then set out to win even the Catholics attending non-Catholic Universities and Colleges, and induced very many of them also to enroll in the "Y."

His zeal, however, was not yet satisfied. In 1889 he urged a program of foreign expansion, and both the "Student Christian Movement" and the "Y.M.C.A." owe their establishment in many lands to his inspiration and devotedness.

In all this, he never for a moment lost sight of his foreign missionary ideals on behalf of religion. Under his influence, many U. S. Summer Conferencés of the Y.M.C.A. were almost completely identified with the missionary cause, responding with men and money for different Protestant missions in Japan, India and Brazil. It is not surprising, in the light of all this, that John R. Mott was chosen as Chairman of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910. A deeply-religious man, he was not very "church-conscious," and cared little therefore, whether this or that Church preached Christ, so long as Christ was preached. But he had inherited a Protestant outlook on religion, and knew no other. Nor, utterly sincere as he was, did he realize the principles of indifferentism latent in his system of undogmatic Christianity.

His ambition for the Y.M.C.A. itself was that it should establish in every country of the world indigenous, self-directing, self-supporting and self-propagating institutions; a program which, as we shall see, led to unending complications.

Today there are over 15,000 Young Men's Christian Associations in some 60 different countries, with more than 3

million members; and the organization can be defined as a world-wide interdenominational lay Association with a well-defined and most efficient program of religious, intellectual, physical and social activities.

Religious Character of the Y. M. C. A.

George Williams and his associates had originally formed the Y.M.C.A. in 1844 mainly for the purpose of prayer in common and Bible study, and to enlist other religiously-minded young men in a crusade for the extension of the Kingdom of Christ according to Protestant evangelical ideas of what that Kingdom was meant to be.

Eleven years later the so-called "Paris Basis," already mentioned, defined the official attitude of the Association which was to be above all else a religious and missionary force; and to this day such is the primary aim of the organization.

Thus the "Encyclopaedia Americana" explains: "Its chief work is religious, the system having four features: (1) Religious meetings, chiefly evangelistic; (2) Personal work for individuals, which seeks through individual interviews to win young people into the Christian life; (3) Bible study, which seeks to organize young people into Bible departments for their religious education; (4) Missions, which is an effort to interest young people in the study and support of the work of the Association in non-Catholic lands."

The fundamental purpose is, then, religious; and all else must be subordinated to that. Despite this, the Y.M.C.A. has often been represented as a cultural center, catering for the intellectual and physical improvement of young citizens, and offering them healthy recreation in a decent environment. And it may be true that some individual branches do not take the religious obligations seriously, becoming little more than

secular and social clubs. But these are the rare exceptions, false to the ideals of the Association, and such an estimate cannot possibly be applied to the organization as such.

In Australia, back in 1926, the Federal Commissioner of Taxation decided that the Y.M.C.A.'s immense city buildings were really hotels, providing rented rooms for travellers and conducting profitable restaurants for the public, and that it could not therefore claim the exemption from taxation granted to religious institutes. Y.M.C.A. officials fought the Commissioner through the courts, insisting that their Association, although not affiliated with any of the recognized Churches, was indeed a "Religious Institute," proving from documentary evidence that it was founded primarily for religious purposes and securing from the High Court of Australia a verdict to that effect, and that its premises were exempt from taxation. (Y.M.C.A. v. Fed. Commr. of Taxn. (1926) 37, Com. Law. Repts. 351.)

In America, in 1950, the National Council may have seemed to lend color to the suggestion that the "Y" was losing sight of its original and religious aim by the stress it placed on social work and the task of building up merely a spirit of sound and responsible citizenship. But even this Council added, without emphasizing it, that the Christian purpose was paramount and must be the motive for all the rest.

In fact, every hint of a decline of the original religious platform has brought a reaction at once. Always the Y.M.C.A. must reassert itself as a militant Christian body, never allowing itself to degenerate into a mere club. This has been proclaimed over and over again in official documents and in resolutions at Conventions almost as regularly as they have been held.

It follows that all the various social and cultural amenities are not ends in themselves. They are means of attracting

young men—and quite a good means—in the hope that from their number new members may be recruited and led on to religious instruction, conversion, and apostolic zeal. Normally, those in charge of the different departments are “committed” men, men of a deeply-religious nature who have consecrated their own lives to Christ and are able to afford spiritual help, however prudently and discreetly, to all making use of available facilities.

I can speak from experience here, for as a young man keenly interested in physical culture, I used to attend the local Y.M. C.A. gymnasium. Although not even an “associate member”, I was entitled to do so for a small fee as a visitor only. Religiously, I was a Protestant, although not a practising one by any means. Our instructor was an excellent gymnast. Almost monotonously the “A” grade team trained by him won every gymnastic competition for which it was entered; which meant that aspirants of all kinds sought to enroll in his classes. But he was a past-master in the art of enkindling a further interest in the religious activities of the institution, and to this day I admire his zeal despite my having been so unresponsive to it. Newcomers would be given leaflets setting out the times when Bible classes took place, or when spiritual talks would be given and prayer-meetings held. If these had no effect, hints would be given us that these were regular features which the “Y” expected us to attend; and it was even pointedly suggested that we were welcome if we came for the advantages of the Christian influence we could receive, whilst if we had in view only the cultural amenities provided we could just as easily get those elsewhere. In the end, I transferred to a Methodist Young Men’s Club which placed an excellent gymnasium with all necessary equipment at the disposal of its members, but where religion was never mentioned.

From all this it is clear that no one can sincerely deny the

Y.M.C.A. to be a religious body. But more must be said about the kind of religion to which it is committed.

Essentially Protestant

The religion of the Young Men's Christian Association was intended from the very beginning to be Protestant. The founders were Protestants, and thought only in terms of the Protestantism they knew. They accepted Chillingworth's principle that "the Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants." And Bible study was to be the chief means of religious instruction.

In 1868 the International Convention at Detroit, U.S.A., reaffirmed that the control and management of the Association must remain in the hands of those who "testify their faith by becoming and remaining members of churches held to be evangelical, and that such persons, and none others, should be allowed to vote or hold office."

In the following year, 1869, this was endorsed by a Convention at Portland, and became known as the "Portland Test" or "Evangelical Test." Moreover, in local groups there were to be two classes of members, "full" members and "associate" members. The former were to consist only of Protestants whose lives were fully committed to Christ, and from these alone were to be chosen officers who would guarantee to maintain the evangelical character and mission of the Association. The latter class was open to any other, unconverted Protestants, or even to Catholics and Jews. These could avail themselves of privileges on payment of dues as "associate" members, but without being entrusted with the responsibilities of full membership.

Whilst this distinction is still maintained in many places, it has been found difficult to abide by it universally. It may be the ideal, but it has been found impracticable. To get around

it, a North American Convention declared in 1931 that the Y.M.C.A. really aimed at "a world-wide fellowship of men and boys united by common loyalty to Jesus Christ for the purpose of building Christian personality." This ignored the "Portland Test," for Catholics could be brought in under that and be admitted to full membership. The wording of the resolution caused a good deal of resentment, therefore, and caused many protests on the part of those who insisted that full membership should be limited to men belonging to Protestant Churches only.

However, the decision held its ground to some extent, so that the Massachusetts and Rhode Island Convention in 1951 went on record with the resolution that not only Catholics but even Jews could be admitted as full members with the right to vote, although they were not to be eligible to positions of control. Those in office were obliged still to maintain the Christian purpose of the institute and to work in with Protestant Churches only, the Y.M.C.A. itself remaining undenominational, or rather interdenominational.

Religiously, therefore, and on a world-basis, the Association remains a Protestant organization. As a matter of fact, in non-Christian foreign countries, such as India, China and Japan, it is regarded wherever it is established simply as a mission of the evangelical Churches, every bit as much as foundations established by the Congregationalist "London Missionary Society."

Relations with Churches

It must not be thought that, because officials had to be members "of churches held to be evangelical", the Y.M.C.A. itself was to be tied to any particular Protestant Church.

The founders had acted as individuals who had been "personally converted to Christ." They were content to devote themselves to Bible reading and prayer. They were Protes-

tants, yes; but they felt little need of any Church. No doubt they were church-goers for purposes of public worship. But their organization was their own, and quite independent of church-influence. And throughout the 19th century, as the enterprise grew, it was not much concerned about relationships with Churches.

After World War I, however, a notable change took place. Seeking expansion, the Y.M.C.A.'s found it impossible to render the spiritual and social services they wished without the co-operation of the Churches in the countries in which they wanted to work. So they entered into friendly relations in every way open to them in order to secure the help of the Churches in their work for youth. Yet here again, they had no desire to serve the Churches. The Churches were to serve them.

In Germany, Norway and Denmark, the Y.M.C.A.'s became practically parish organizations; that is, the Churches organized them as parochial young people's societies; but although closely related to the Lutheran and Calvinist Churches, these societies did not form an organic part of them. They were under the control of the International Y.M.C.A. Committee with which they were affiliated.

In America, also, although not entering into so close a relationship as the one just mentioned, the Y.M.C.A. definitely sought the co-operation of the Protestant Churches. Again, the Association is ranked as one of the "Major Allies" of the World Council of Churches, most members of which owe their "ecumenical inspiration" to the interdenominational outlook they acquired through contact with it; and to this day the Y.M.C.A. is a "consulting member" of the World Council, although it cannot participate as a "Church" in its deliberations.

The truth is that the spirit of the "Y" remains basically

one of Protestant individualism. In his book, "The Church of England and Reunion," Dr. H. L. Goudge describes this outlook by saying: "We are congenital individualists; and exceedingly unwilling to recognize our dependence upon others. It appears to us obvious that our religion is wholly bound up with our individual relation to God, and that others are not concerned with it . . . We think of God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of all who believe in Christ and follow Him . . . This conception of our situation . . . has been so widely accepted by Protestants that it may almost be described as the Protestant view. In its extreme form it brings about a dislike to any importance being attached to the Church . . . Our rooted individualism is not really overcome . . . We become members of Christ — so we think — by our individual faith alone; and we then attach ourselves to some Christian body in a free association which we may dissolve as we will." (pp. 61, 62)

Many a Protestant clergyman who has advised his young men to join the Y.M.C.A. has become sadly aware of their waning interest in his Church and of their almost complete absorption in "Y" activities, contented with the Bible study and the prayer meetings the Association provides for them.

We arrive at the conclusion, therefore, that the Y.M.C.A. is a religious body, Protestant in character, but essentially intended to remain detached from any of the organized Churches.

Under Lay Control

This leads to a further and most important aspect of our study. The Y.M.C.A. is of its very nature a lay organization. It is primarily an association of lay Christians led by laymen. It is determined to be in no way subject to ecclesiastical control, and will tolerate no clerical intervention in its affairs. It

inculcates a kind of dread of "ecclesiasticism" of any sort. It claims to be a voluntary movement independent of all Churches as ecclesiastically organized, without exception.

The World Committee, at its Nyborg Strand Conference in 1950, recorded its approbation of this independence in the resolution: "The World Committee notes with deep satisfaction that the Y.M.C.A., by virtue of its lay character, is successfully enlisting in its membership young men and boys of all the Christian confessions."

Here arises the great dilemma for the Y.M.C.A. Many members are not too happy at all about its relations with the World Council of Churches. They fear that the increasing activities of the World Council of Churches in youth work will seriously interfere with their own, and that the ecclesiastical constitution of the various Churches may restrict the influence of the non-ecclesiastically-organized body which is to them more important than any Church.

Yet despite misgivings, the Y.M.C.A. has in general welcomed and supported the World Council of Churches, feeling that at least on a consultative basis it has a contribution to make to the ecumenical movement towards the unification of Christians. It even boasts that it has a peculiar mission to pioneer the ecumenical advance among Catholics, above all in Catholic countries and in U.S.A.

Here, however, arises the other horn of the dilemma. Many "Y" authorities are anything but happy about the position in Catholic countries. They realize the immense difficulty of faithful adherence to the basic aims of the Y.M.C.A. by Catholics who, in religious matters, cannot remain Catholics whilst declaring independence of ecclesiastical authority.

Is the Association to progress in Catholic countries? If so, it can only be at the price of becoming a religiously-Catholic Association, or else merely a non-religious club, the members

of which will have nothing to do with the Protestantism the "Y" exists to promote, but who accept the religious teachings and obligations taught them by their Church. In that case, with its primary purpose gone, the Y.M.C.A. would cease to be itself in such localities, retaining only the title and no more than a nominal adherence to the World Alliance.

Failing this, the alternative is that Catholics who join must be prepared to abandon their religion, accepting Protestantism either according to one or other of the evangelical Churches, or a Protestantism of a vague and undenominational kind altogether, if not one of a straight-out anticlericalism.

This last position has arisen in the Philippine Islands where, in 1951, writing in the July issue of the "Philippines Young Men," Dr. Isidro Panlasagui said: "The Y.M.C.A. in our country should take the initiative . . . to develop . . . true religious consciousness — true Christian life, not merely church-life which is at best fanatic, bigoted and pharisaic."

This is the logical result of trying to maintain a professedly-religious organization under lay control only, and quite independently of any church-authority whatsoever.

Needless to say, the Catholic Church could not tolerate the acceptance of such a definite and bitter anticlericalism by her own Catholic young men, and in 1953 Archbishop Rosales, of Cebu, Philippine Islands, imposed excommunication upon any Catholics joining the Philippine Y.M.C.A. But Protestant ministers must be equally unhappy about developments there, with the manifest contempt for church-life in general which cannot but affect their own denominations. Nor can one imagine that the International Committee of the Y.M.C.A. is itself content with the position adopted by Dr. Panlasagui and other Association officials in the Philippine Islands.

The truth is that there can be no solution of this problem so long as the Y.M.C.A. remains what it is, and the Catholic

Church remains what it is; and the Catholic Church is certainly not going to cease to be the Catholic Church, however many defections the "Y" may succeed in bringing about in this or that locality.

The extreme position which has arisen in the Philippine Islands is not likely to arise in the United States. It is difficult to imagine that membership of the Y.M.C.A. would inspire an American Catholic, at least directly, to develop a contempt for, and hostility towards his own Church. But indirectly, and in the long run, such an attitude could result from a loss of the Catholic Faith, which is still undoubtedly threatened from many points of view.

Always a Danger

In U.S.A. the leaders of the Y.M.C.A. wish to extend the olive branch to Catholics, entering into friendly relations with them and offering them the use of their facilities not only on the basis of an "associate," but even, as we have seen, on a basis of "full" membership.

But the Catholic who accepts runs into that very real, if subtle, danger of a religious indifferentism which can end in a complete loss of faith. It may be that hostility to their own Church is not directly engendered in Catholics by their membership of the "Y." But they cannot escape the constant impact on their minds of the prevailing conviction of other members that no Church really matters.

This attitude is a legacy from the very beginning of the organization. When discussing with other young men in the drapery business the foundation of the Y.M.C.A., George Williams, the originator of the movement, said: "Here we are, an Episcopalian, a Methodist, a Baptist and a Congregationalist — four believers, but a single faith in Christ. Forward together!"

These young men were indifferent to any specific forms of doctrine, worship or discipline regarded as essential by "Churches," and the "single faith" they professed in Christ was little more than a sentimental attachment to Him, expressed by Bible reading and prayer, together with the desire to live according to (undefined) Christian standards of behavior. The emphasis was upon conduct, not upon creed. They wanted a "way of life" divorced from dogma and ritual, which could be left to the Churches.

That spirit permeates the Y.M.C.A. to this day. Quite a good Catholic young man may begin by making use of "Y" facilities. He is attracted by social amenities; joins for the sake of the "gym" or "swimming pool;" finds himself impressed by the decent fellows with whom he comes into contact; gets swept into various harmless functions of a non-religious nature.

There may be no direct proselytizing approach. He may be told that it does not matter to what Church he belongs. But only too often the impression is created that it does not matter whether he belongs to any Church at all. Sooner or later, our Catholic young man finds himself attending lectures on scientific, philosophical, theological or moral topics, in which he comes directly under the influence of a Protestant evangelizing force. There is all the difference in the world between the ideas now being put before him, and those of his Catholic religion. Scientific materialism, philosophical agnosticism, all kinds of doctrinal aberrations, and ethical standards on such major subjects as divorce, birth-control, euthanasia, abortion, cremation, gambling, prohibition rather than moderation in drink, films, the reading of highly-commended but morally-doubtful "best-selling" literature — all these things sow the seeds of doubt about the Catholic "way of life" as contrasted with that of these after all "good" non-Catholics.

Plunged into such an atmosphere, his loyalty to Catholic beliefs and principles begins to fade. He becomes indifferent to them, and gradually loses the Faith, perhaps graduating from being a fallen-away Catholic into a militant enemy of the Church he once so loved and to which he was so faithful.

Even if the worst does not happen, it is sheer delusion for any Catholic to imagine that he will remain every bit as good a Catholic as before, after having joined the Y.M.C.A. His spirit of faith will soon be very different from what it was. His piety will be diverted from sound Catholic lines into false Protestant channels. His specifically Catholic obligations will mean less and less to him. He will grow negligent in receiving the Sacraments. He will soon find himself missing Mass intermittently, and finally dropping it altogether. The Catholic who has been a member of the "Y" for any length of time and is still a fervent and practical Catholic, devoted to his religion, eager to promote its interests, filled with zeal to win as many other souls to it as possible, just doesn't exist.

Official Attitude of the Church

The Catholic Church, faithful to her mission as the one true Church of Christ founded upon the Apostles and divinely commissioned to teach all nations God's revealed religion, has always held it to be sinful to adopt or sanction in any way the idea that one religion is as good as another, and that it does not matter to what Church one belongs, if to any.

Moreover she has always taught that her members are seriously obliged to avoid occasions of sin in general, and especially any deliberate endangering of the great gift of their Catholic Faith, which is the very "substance of our hopes and conviction of eternal unseen realities." (Heb. XI:1). For these reasons she forbids her children to take any active part in religious movements outside her own fold.

Since the Protestant reformation in the 16th century many such non-Catholic religious movements have arisen. These have not only taken the form of dissident Churches. Many have been lay-associations of religiously-inclined men who have worked on basically inadequate and false principles which they have mistakenly if sincerely believed to be genuinely Christian. And the Catholic Church would have failed in her duty had she not consistently put her members on their guard against active participation in such movements.

It would take too long to cite all relevant documents and decrees bearing on this matter. But, in 1884, Pope Leo XIII issued the general warning that, besides the often-condemned Masonic Lodges, there are other societies which cannot be said to have any connection with Freemasonry, but which are nevertheless a danger to Catholics and forbidden to them by reason of the end for which they are established and the manner of their control.

In the end, the Catholic Code of Canon Law, in No. 684, gave a succinct statement of the position Catholics are obliged to adopt by declaring that they "must beware of associations which are secret, condemned, seditious or suspect; or which seek to evade the legitimate supervision of the Church."

This law is not intended to convey a mere warning. It is intended as a positive prohibition. And the only question that arises where the Y.M.C.A. is concerned is whether or not it constitutes one of the classes of society mentioned.

We can certainly rule out the first three. The Y.M.C.A. is not a secret society, whose members are bound by oath to conceal the names of its leaders, constitutions and its activities from lawful civil or ecclesiastical authorities. Nor is it a "formally-condemned" society, under pain of excommunication, as is that of Freemasonry; although that would not necessarily mean that it is not a forbidden society, and even

under pain of grave sin. Also, the Y.M.C.A. does not belong to the third category of forbidden societies; namely, those that are seditious. It is not a subversive movement, engaging in plots and schemes to overthrow legitimate civil governments or any forms of ecclesiastical authority.

It is true that, on October 15, 1947, three office-holders in the Queens Branch of the kindred society, the Y.W.C.A., in New York, published the fact that they had resigned, two of them declaring that the national administration of the "Y" was "tainted with Communism." Also, a year later, on Nov. 22, 1948, the Un-American Activities Committee in Washington accused both the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. of corrupting religion in the United States and of "influencing thought and action towards Communist ends." But even granted the truth of such allegations, one would have to brand those involved in such activities as guilty of an abuse quite at variance with the spirit and constitutions of the "Y's", exonerating the Associations as such.

However, there are two remaining specifications in Canon 684 at which we must look more closely. Societies are forbidden to Catholics which are "suspect", and also which seek, not to plot against the Church, but "to evade its lawful supervision."

A society is "suspect" in the eyes of the Catholic Church if the faith or morals of Catholics who join it are endangered by the religious indifferentism it fosters, or by its teachings, activities, or the influence of its other members. And there can be no doubt, in the light of all that has been said in our discussion of it, that the Y.M.C.A. comes within this category. Moreover, it undoubtedly evades the lawful supervision of the Catholic Church in matters pertaining to the spiritual welfare of her subjects.

Some forty years ago, before the promulgation of the

present Code of Canon Law, the Right Rev. Dr. T. Corbett, Bishop of Crookston, Minn., issued a pastoral letter on this subject of the Y.M.C.A. Much that he said was applicable then, but has ceased to apply now, owing to modifications of the rules and regulations of the Y.M.C.A. itself. But much that he said is still applicable, above all his injunction against joining the Association.

“The Y.M.C.A.,” he wrote, “is essentially a Protestant institution . . . Catholic young men should not suffer themselves, therefore, to be duped by an organization for the sake of athletic or educational advantages, of position, or of social standing . . . (Let them) therefore cease to join an Association which will eventually rob them of their faith. No Catholic, to my knowledge, ever became a permanent member of the Y. M.C.A. without growing lukewarm in his faith, and finally descending so low as to abandon the only and true Church of his forefathers. Catholics who join that organization soon imagine that one religion is as good as another, and that the Y.M.C.A. is the best of all.”

In 1920, two years after the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law, Pope Benedict XV, through the Holy Office, not only designated the Y.M.C.A. expressly by name as one of the “suspect” societies according to Canon 684, but declared it one of the most dangerous of the societies falling within that category. In a circular letter, the Holy Office, on Nov. 5, 1920, praised the humanitarian and social welfare work of the Association, but said that its Protestant character and religious influence rendered Catholic membership reprehensible.

“Among these associations,” the letter declared, “it will suffice to mention one which is, as it were, the parent of many others, being extremely widespread (especially owing to its valuable relief work during the war), and backed by immense resources; namely, the Young Men’s Christian Association,

or Y.M.C.A. It has the undiscerning support, not only of well-meaning non-Catholics who think it salutary to all, but also of some easy-going Catholics who are blind to its true nature. It proclaims its sincere love of youth, as though it had nothing more at heart than to serve their bodily and mental welfare; but at the same time it weakens their faith, under the pretext of purifying it and giving them a better knowledge of the true life "above every Church and independently of any religious creed."

The letter concludes, therefore, by calling upon Catholic Bishops everywhere "to guard young people carefully from the contagion of such societies," and to agree among themselves in regional meetings on measures suitable to meet the situation.

In 1952 the Catholic Action authorities in Italy issued a statement reminding all Catholics that membership of the Y.M.C.A. must be regarded by them as forbidden, in virtue of Canon 684 of the Code of Canon Law, and also of the decision of the Holy Office on Nov. 5, 1920. They did not say that membership was merely "inadvisable," but that it was definitely prohibited.

Some Catholic writers, taking mild views, have held that, whilst the Y.M.C.A. is officially declared by the Church to be a "suspect" society, only a general warning against it is intended, and not a prohibition of membership on the part of Catholics *under pain of grave sin*.

If that interpretation be accepted, Catholics would not normally commit grave sin and forfeit the right to the Sacraments by joining and remaining members of the "Y." They would do so only in particular and exceptional cases where the local Bishop has declared the units operating in his own diocese to be a positive danger to Catholics, and has issued

a formal prohibition binding all Catholics subject to his jurisdiction.

My own studies and experiences have compelled me to disagree with that interpretation, and to hold that the very reverse is true. That is, normally it is *gravely sinful* for a Catholic to join the Y.M.C.A. Only exceptionally could a Catholic become a member without committing grave sin; namely, in those particular places where the Bishop sanctions such membership, at least tacitly, under the conviction that the danger to the faith of Catholics in that precise locality is negligible, and that they are not withdrawn in any way from the legitimate supervision of the Church in all that has to do with religious beliefs and activities.

Such an exceptional position might arise in Catholic countries where the membership is overwhelmingly Catholic, and where the institution has become practically a Catholic club, with the primary objective of the Protestant religious formation of adherents entirely ignored. Such a unit, however, would no longer be a "Young Men's Christian Association" in the original sense of the word; that is, an active branch of an organization founded under Protestant auspices for the greater diffusion of Protestantism.

Yet even in these exceptional cases membership of Catholics in the Y.M.C.A. could be only tolerated, not commended. For each such unit, merely by bearing the name, would help to increase the prestige of an International Organization working elsewhere as a most ardent proselytizing agency on behalf of Protestantism in other Catholic countries. Presumably, also, affiliation with the World Alliance would involve financial contributions towards such work.

Latest Modifications

It is only fair to mention here the latest modifications

international officials of the Y.M.C.A. have been willing to make, although with many heart-burnings among the rank-and-file Protestant members throughout the world, and protests from them. It is a complicated story.

World War I brought to the Y.M.C.A. a golden opportunity, of which it took advantage with immense zeal and generosity. Material aid for the soldiers was poured out lavishly, but always with the main purpose in view, the religious welfare of the men. Under "Y" auspices, over 200 American Protestant clergymen were sent to minister to their needs, and they were provided with some 5 million copies of the New Testament for distribution. "Y" huts were used for Protestant services, Bible classes, and personal spiritual help to the men whenever occasion offered.

After the conclusion of the War in 1918, the "Y" continued its activities, helping in reconstruction work throughout Europe. And here it saw a chance to break into the ranks of Eastern Orthodox and Catholic peoples. Its emissaries were ardent missionaries on behalf of their "evangelical" conception of Christianity. They were sincere. They really thought that in Poland and Austria, Hungary and Italy, and throughout the Balkans, they were the bearers of the light of the Gospel to those who had been sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.

Together with dispensing food and clothing, therefore, they labored to convert the simple European peasants, destitute and starving, to Protestantism. And the resurgence of missionary zeal inspired Y.M.C.A.'s back in U.S.A. to intensify evangelizing work in Latin American countries, and even to undertake drives for the recruiting of Catholic members of the Association on the "home front" itself.

The Catholic Church could not remain silent in the face of such proselytizing, however well-meant it might be. Hence

the solemn warning against religious activities of the Y.M.C.A. among Catholics which was issued by Pope Benedict XV on Nov. 5, 1920. And this warning was followed by a wave of protests in similar vein by Catholic Bishops from Poland to Italy, Peru to Canada, and within the United States themselves.

The approach to Catholics raised a particular problem for the Y.M.C.A. if the "Evangelical Test" for membership had to be applied, the only thing to do was to convert Catholics to Protestantism first, and then admit them to the Association. The alternative was to suspend the "Evangelical Test", admit Catholics as Catholics, and after that try to convert them to Protestantism within the institute. The latter procedure was thought more practicable. But when it was tried in Peru, it promptly brought a Pastoral Letter from the Archbishop of Lima, in Jan. 1921, forbidding Peruvian Catholics to have anything to do with the Y.M.C.A. because of its proselytizing activities. In April of the same year, 1921, Archbishop Bruchesi, of Montreal, denounced similar activities in Canada. And we have already seen how Bishop Corbett, of Crookston, Minn., had earlier spoken out in U.S.A.

Feeling that they were up against a brick wall, the international authorities of the Y.M.C.A. decided that, in non Protestant lands at least, their Association would never make any real headway unless it abolished the "Evangelical Test." Experience in the Orthodox Balkan countries convinced officials that indigenous foundations had no hope of permanency unless set up within an Orthodox framework and under the complete control of Orthodox laymen. In the 1930's, therefore, the World Alliance, under the chairmanship of John R. Mott, resolved that in predominantly Orthodox countries the Y.M.C.A. should be conducted in harmony with Orthodox principles and in consultation with Orthodox leaders. This

move was not without success, but it was at the expense of the strictly Protestant character of the Association in Greece, Bulgaria and Rumania, and elsewhere in the Middle East; much to the distress of many Protestant members of the Y.M.C.A. throughout the world.

However, the compromising give-and-take agreed to by the Eastern Orthodox Churches proved quite unacceptable to the Catholic Church; and little or no progress was made among her members. But the Y.M.C.A. did not lose hope. World War II came. Again the "Y" rendered magnificent service to the fighting-men, and its prestige and expansion increased accordingly. New efforts followed to win Catholics into its fold.

To make it easier for Catholics, and at the same time to placate its Protestant members, the World Alliance laid down in 1944 certain basic principles which it deemed necessary for future success.

It declared: (1) The Organization must be loyal to its dominant purpose as a Young Men's *Christian* Association. (2) This purpose must pervade all its work. (3) The Association must be adapted to the needs of the local and national community. (4) It must be loyal to the tradition of *lay* leadership, sacrificing life, time and money for the work. (5) It must cooperate loyally with church, home, university and school, not competing selfishly with these in isolation from them. (6) It must regard the 400 million young men of the world as its parish. (7) It must aim at building a "new man" and a "new society" by a program of the "whole gospel" for the whole man, nation and world.

But these declarations, as understood by the World Alliance, could still not possibly be reconciled with the Catholic religion. The well-meaning Protestant leaders spoke of a program of the "whole gospel" which was not the "whole gospel;" they still envisaged a religious and Christian purpose to be

attained under lay leadership, as if Christ had not so much as instituted a Church, the members of which, in all that had to do with His religion, were subject to the Apostles and their successors throughout the ages.

In Italy, endeavoring to adapt the Y.M.C.A. to "the needs of the local and national community," a Convention at Portovenere in 1946 defined it as "a free Association, independent of any other civil or religious organization, to develop personality physically, intellectually and spiritually in the Christian faith and life, according to each one's convictions and traditions." But the Protestant principle of private judgment, leaving it to each member to decide for himself what the Christian faith is, and the indifferentism as regards any specific doctrines or duties, were only too evident; and we have seen how, in 1952, the Catholic Action authorities in Italy declared the "Y" forbidden to Catholics.

In Palestine an extraordinary position has arisen, based upon the new principle of "adaptation." There the requirement that the Association must always remain "Christian" has simply been jettisoned. In an article on "Jerusalem Y.M.C.A. Activities," published in "Christian News From Israel," Dec. 1955, the Rev. Herbert L. Minard admits that, of the 2,350 members of the "Y" in the Holy City, 90% are Jews, the other 10% consisting of Moslems and Christians — the "three monotheistic faiths" being accepted on "an equal footing!" Is it any wonder that, anticipating such a compromising of the Christian religion, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Monsignor Barlassina, issued a Pastoral Letter in 1932 forbidding membership of the Y.M.C.A. to Catholics?

Notwithstanding all these difficulties and complications, the Paris World Conference, on August 18, 1955, called for "new efforts to bridge the historic gap between the Roman Catholic Church and the Y.M.C.A."

But there is no way in which this can be done, so long as the Y.M.C.A. remains a religious organization under lay leadership, professing a religion which is not the Catholic religion, and repudiating the constitutional ecclesiastical authority proper to the Catholic Church.

In the meantime, the vast majority of members both of the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. have long been profoundly concerned about what they regard as the sacrificing of the Protestantism in which their Associations are so deeply rooted; and are particularly opposed to the admission as members, not only of Moslems, Jews and Eastern Orthodox Christians, but especially of Catholics.

Conclusion

The first thing that has emerged clearly from the preceding pages is surely that the Y.M.C.A. is a religious organization, definitely Protestant in its basic principles despite its efforts to rise above the "inter-denominational" to a "super-denominational" level.

It exists primarily for the religious betterment of its members, all else being intended as a means to that end. It was founded by Protestants for Protestants. That it has accomplished much good among Protestants according to their own religious outlook, no one would wish to deny. But the Catholic Church has no choice except to forbid Catholics to join such a religious society, just as she is bound to forbid them to join the Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian or any other religious body. The Y.M.C.A. cannot be ranked with Rotary, or with the Lions Club, or any other organizations which expressly declare themselves to be non-religious. For it is itself insistent that it must be regarded as a religious Association.

Secondly, it must be remembered that the Y.M.C.A. is an

international organization, not all of whose members are of one mind by any means. Even whilst it seems to water down its Protestantism to a vague and indefinite minimum in some places in order to induce Catholics to join it, in other places, and in the vast majority of them, its members remain militantly Protestant, and even anti-Catholic. Thus, in 1916, the "Pan-Protestant Congress" in Panama drew up a program for the Protestantizing of South America. The fourth largest contribution financially for this purpose came from the Y.M.C.A. Again, wherever any movements arise calculated to do harm to the cause of Catholicism, or to deny justice to Catholics in civic life, support from members, and above all from officials of the Y.M.C.A. is almost sure to be forthcoming. Catholics who join the Association cannot escape responsibility for co-operation with all the activities in which the "Y" as a whole engages throughout the world. Such Catholics are enemies of their own Faith, and of their fellow-Catholics elsewhere, however mild and harmless individual non-Catholic members with whom they are in immediate contact may seem to be.

Thirdly, experience has shown only too clearly that, in the vast majority of cases, the Y.M.C.A. does not, and cannot result in the "religious betterment" of Catholics, whatever it may be able to accomplish for its own Protestant young men. The Catholic who joins the "Y" invariably has his faith weakened and his convictions so undermined that he becomes indifferent to the teachings and obligations of his religion, ending, if not in a complete loss of faith, as yet another non-practising and fallen-away Catholic.

Fourthly, the ecclesiastical authorities have spoken so often, so clearly, so definitely, and so seriously on this matter that there can be no doubt about the mind of the Catholic Church on the subject. In the light of such utterances, no loyal

Catholic could regard himself as free in conscience to cooperate in any way with the organization known as the Young Men's Christian Association.

Catholics who join it, or who, having done so, continue as members instead of resigning from it, can be excused from grave sin only by their lack of knowledge, and by their not having understood its nature and the world-wide scope of its work — an excuse no Catholic who has read this booklet carefully could possibly urge on his own behalf.

At the outset the promise was made that, however involved and complicated our subject might prove to be, the conclusion would be very definite and clear, and the path to be followed unmistakable for those Catholics of goodwill who desire above all else to be true to their Faith. No one, surely, can declare that promise to have remained unfulfilled.

Appendix

The "Young Women's Christian Association"

The "Young Women's Christian Association" came into being independently of the Y.M.C.A., some eleven years after the founding of the latter organization. It began in 1855 as a result of the merging of two movements, one entirely spiritual, devoted to Bible reading and prayer, started by a Miss Emma Roberts; the other a work for the provision of hostels to cater for young business women, commenced by Lady Kinnaird.

Within three years the idea had found its way from London, its place of origin, to America, and in 1858 the first premises were established in New York. Growth was rapid in U.S.A., and in 1906 a National Organization of Y.W.C.A.'s was formed.

The National Constitution of the Y.W.C.A. defines its objective as follows:

"The immediate purpose of this organization shall be to

unite in one body the Young Women's Christian Associations of the United States; to establish, develop and unify such Associations; to participate in the work of the World's Young Women's Christian Association; to advance the physical, social, intellectual, moral and spiritual interests of young women.

"The ultimate purpose of all its efforts shall be to seek to bring young women to such a knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord as shall mean for the individual young woman fullness of life and development of character, and shall make the organization as a whole an effective agency in the bringing in of the Kingdom of God among young women."

Here again, as with the Y.M.C.A., we have an Association primarily religious in nature, founded by Protestants, for Protestants, according to Protestant interpretations of what faith in Christ implies, and of what the Kingdom of God is meant to be. And those interpretations cannot be harmonized with Catholic doctrine. Nor can the Catholic Church agree that the Y.W.C.A. is a suitable source to which Catholic girls should look for "moral and spiritual" guidance.

In 1894 a World Federation of Young Women's Christian Associations was formed, and the development has been on parallel lines with those of the Y.M.C.A. A similar "Evangelical Test" for full membership was accepted; but only until 1914, when another and broader basis was adopted at the Stockholm Conference in order to bring in Eastern Orthodox Churches, and possibly Catholics.

The new basis adopted by the World Conference, however, was not universally accepted by National and Local Associations. Great uneasiness was expressed about the possible consequences to the spiritual work of the Y.W.C.A. if "Roman Catholics" were admitted to full membership. The National

Councils of Finland and South Africa withdrew from affiliation with the World Alliance in protest against the change.

In 1951 the World Council held another important Conference at Beirut, Lebanon. It was freely recognized at this Convention that the Young Women's Christian Association had its origin in Protestantism, and that the majority of members are, and are likely to be Protestants. However, it resolved:

“Although, in some countries, the Young Women's Christian Association is, and may remain, a Protestant Movement, the World's Young Women's Christian Association cannot be a Protestant Movement . . . in order that the World's Young Women's Christian Association may grow more truly into an ecumenical Movement.”

But dropping the name “Protestant” whilst continuing to adhere to specifically Protestant religious concepts does not better things. An “ecumenical” or world-wide fellowship, whether based on an “interdenominational” or a “superdenominational” lowest common factor of evangelical Protestantism, is no sufficient substitute for the genuine “Communion of Saints” in which Catholics profess their faith every time they recite the Apostles' Creed, and of which they know the Catholic Church to be the one authentic visible representative in this world.

As far as Catholics are concerned, therefore, all that has been said about the Y.M.C.A. applies also to the Y.W.C.A. Membership of it would lend support to religious teachings they know to be false and would amount to a repudiation of their own faith. In conscience, therefore, no Catholic girl is justified in being a member of the Y.W.C.A.

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