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- The truth-seeker...
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A TRUTH-SEEKER

And His Answer

WHAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS

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A Truth-Seeker and His Answer

By REV. A. P. DOYLE, C.S.P.

THE following letter has come to us, and because there breathes through it a spirit of earnestness it is very attractive. We believe the writer is a type of a large class of people who live in the rural districts of our country. In spite of the fact that Catholics number at least 21,000,000 in the United States, and are more or less in evidence in the public press, there are many thousands of non-Catholics who know as little of the teachings of the Catholic Church and of the religious practices of Catholics as they do of the tenets of Buddhism. It may serve a good purpose to give the letter in full, and with it an exposition of the teachings of the Catholic Church which has satisfied many an honest desire for the truth.

MR. SEARLE.

DEAR SIR: Your book, *Plain Facts for Fair Minds*, accidentally came to my house. Being naturally of a fair mind, I suppose the book is for me. I have read it through carefully and have reread it. I am a Protestant.

I did not know that Catholics had so many claims for existence or reasons for their faith. I took them to be blind, wholly blind and dead to all that is good and reasonable. I have often wished I could find some of their teachings. I have often wanted to go to their meetings, but I never felt that I was made welcome; but this book has some good things, at least from a human point of view.

Of course it does not satisfy me. Haven't you a small book that treats of the deeper things of God and Salvation? I have read Fénelon, which is very good! also À Kempis. All that I hear of Catholics and their practices is below heathendom.

I had intended to write an exposure of Catholicism, but before I do I ought to know all that Catholics believe. I do not judge their lives only by what I hear. It is hardly fair to judge the lives of the members of a Church if it be that the teaching is really sound and wholesome.

Please send me your best modern works on the spiritual life in the soul—remember, modern works written by this generation, the

latest and the best; then I will let you know the result of my search. I send out thousands of my own books free. I print them at my own expense, though I am a retired merchant. I write little books for free distribution—all against the Protestant sects. I deemed the Catholics too far gone to have any hope of their salvation. So please send me what you think will give me the best statement of what constitutes a Catholic. I am an honest seeker for truth, bound to nothing but God. I want to do good at any cost, and I count nothing dear to save my soul and as many more as possible.

Yours for the Truth,

JAMES S——, B——, Mich.

MY DEAR TRUTH-SEEKER: I forward to you the books that you request, and I am sure that the perusal of them with the same open mind which is manifested in your letter will show you that the old Church that has borne the spirit of Christ through the ages is still beautiful enough to attract the eyes of the sons of men.

Every man is at bottom a religious being. He recognizes the overshadowing sovereignty of God, and at times of need or in danger he calls out to his Maker for protection. Most men—the exceptions are the very few—look to Jesus Christ as “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” No man cometh to the Father but through Him. In accepting Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we accept every truth that He has revealed to us, and we reject every teaching that He rejects. Every Catholic as well as non-Catholic recognizes his conscience as the guide which must be followed when it is a question of what he is to do or not to do. One’s conscience is like the watch one carries in his pocket. For all practical purposes the watch is his guide. By it he goes to his business, or catches his train, or meets his obligations. In the same way a man’s conscience is his practical guide in all matters of right and wrong. But just here begins the difference between a Catholic and a non-Catholic. A Catholic has an external standard that is unerring, whereby he can set his conscience aright if it be wrong, in the same way as we all have an authoritative standard of time according to which every one sets his watch.

An Authoritative Standard

This external standard is an unerring Church which Christ has established to represent Him in the world.

The Church is "the pillar and ground of truth" (1 Tim. iii. 15). It is "without spot or wrinkle." "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18). It is so constituted that the God-man could say of it, "He that heareth you heareth Me, he that despiseth you despiseth Me" (Luke x. 16); and again, "He that will not hear the Church let him be to thee as a heathen and a publican" (Matt. xviii. 17). The Catholic idea of a "church" is not a gathering of people who believe the same things or who interpret Scripture in the same way, but it is that of an existing corporate organization whose body consists of the faithful scattered throughout the world, of whatever tribe or people, who believe all the teachings of Christ, and who live in obedience to the lawfully constituted bishops with the Pope at their head, and whose soul is the Spirit of God who descended on the Apostles at Pentecost. The Holy Ghost, the soul of the Church, animates the body and gives life to all the members, guiding the teaching authorities into the ways of truth and enabling all to grow into the fullest stature in Christ Jesus.

Church an Organism

The Catholic Church is not so much an organization as it is an organism. When this distinction is fully appreciated one can far more readily understand what the Church is and what she is destined to do for mankind. A number of men may come together and form an organization, and in their corporate capacity they will possess only the wisdom and authority that belongs to the individual men and not any more. A number of fallible men cannot ever attain unto infallibility. Apart from the individuals which make it up it possesses nothing of itself. The individuals may separate from the organization and they may go on their

way rejoicing. Such bodies are said to be "soulless corporations." Not so is it with an organism. A human being is an organism in which all the organs and members depend on their conjunction with the soul for their life. Cut off a hand or a leg, the life does not go with it. It decomposes in death; so, too, is it with the tree. A branch cut from the trunk withers away. In this sense the Church is not an organization that has its existence through a number of people who believe in interpreting Scripture in the same way and are ready to make public profession of their concurrent interpretation, but it is an organism, in which the Holy Ghost is the animating principle, and by establishing the proper relationship one may partake of that divine life which flows from the soul throughout the entire body. To be cut away from this body is spiritual death.

Growth Necessitates Change

It follows from this exposition of the "church idea" that the Catholic Church must of necessity be entirely different in appearance today from what she was a century or ten centuries ago, though in reality she is the same Church teaching the same truths. Growth and development necessitate change. It follows also that, though she changes in appearance, yet because the active principle of the Church, the Holy Ghost, is the same God who founded her, she cannot depart from the truth that was enunciated amidst the Judean hills, and as Christ destined her to be the means of salvation for all the world, and through all time, she will never depart from that truth. There will be as time goes on a clearer enunciation of those truths, a practical exemplification of them as it becomes necessary to apply them to the everchanging affairs of men, and a more accurate definition of great principles when they are assailed by misguided antagonists, but in it all the teaching authority of the Church will be guided by the Spirit of Truth so that the world will not be led into error, and mankind will know where "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" exists.

Having premised these things, we are ready to come to the consideration of the distinctive teachings of the Catholic Church.

The operation of the Holy Ghost is twofold — one through the corporate body, as is indicated by the words of Christ: "I will ask the Father and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you forever" (John xiv. 16); "He will teach you all things" (John xiv. 26); and the other on the individual mind and heart, convincing it of the truth and personally bringing it unto sanctification.

Church as an Authority

It sometimes may happen that what an individual believes may be different from what the Church authoritatively teaches. It may become impossible for one to persuade himself that such and such teachings are true. But as we know truth is one and the same, at all times and in all places, the same Spirit of Truth cannot teach the Church one thing and the individual the opposite thing.

If there be an opposition between the teaching Church and the believing individual, the Church must be right and the individual must be wrong. For on the teaching Church and not on any individual has Christ bestowed the gift of inerrancy. "The Church is the pillar and ground of truth" (1 Tim. iii. 15); "The gates of hell shall not prevail against her" (Matt. xvi. 18). It is, therefore, the duty of the individual to yield his own conviction to the infallible teaching of the Church, and that not in any slavish submission or self-stultification but on the reasonable principle that the Church is an infallible guide and cannot err. "As My Father hath sent Me I also send you" (John xx. 21); "He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me" (Luke x. 16); "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark xvi. 16).

On this reasonable basis the Church secures a marvel-

ous unity of belief. She is everywhere the same in her teaching, and one in the complete, whole-souled acceptance of her teaching by her children.

She presents to the world a wonderful homogeneity, and in these days of free-thinking and independence of minds there is no more marvelous spectacle than the fact of two hundred and sixty millions of people, many of whom are of the highest intelligence and with the utmost freedom of will, accepting her teaching and bowing in submission to her voice as the voice of God.

The Pope as Infallible

In order that there may not be any doubt as to what the teaching of the Church is, Christ has constituted a living voice to speak for Him. In order to yield our conviction to the teaching of the Church, there must not be any danger of our misinterpreting or misunderstanding the sense of established formulas. Mere written statements in a book, no matter how accurately formulated, can never preclude the possibility of this danger. They cannot correct one if he does misunderstand or misinterpret the genuine sense. Hence a living voice is necessary, so that when one does misunderstand, he can be corrected; when he does drift away, he can be called back. He who speaks for an infallible Church must himself be infallible, if he would command the assent of the children of men. When he teaches the whole Church on questions of dogma and morals, he must be preserved from leading the Church astray. Hence the Catholic Church has always believed, from the very beginning, through the nineteen hundred years of her life, that the Pope when teaching *ex-cathedra* cannot teach error. It was in the Vatican Council, after this traditional belief of the Church had been assailed, that it was clearly defined and incorporated into the formulas of the Church. It was no new doctrine, but merely a new formulation of a doctrine as old as Christianity itself. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as

wheat. But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and thou being once converted confirm thy brethren" (Luke xxii. 32).

Words of the Vatican Council

It may be useful to quote here the exact words of the decree of the Vatican Council: "Wherefore faithfully adhering to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian Faith, for the glory of God our Saviour, the exaltation of the Catholic religion, and the salvation of the Christian people, we, the Sacred Council approving, teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed, that the Roman Pontiff when he speaks *ex-cathedra*—that is, when discharging the office of pastor and teacher of all Christians, by reason of his supreme Apostolic authority he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the whole Church—he, by the divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, possesses that infallibility with which the Blessed Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith and morals, and that therefore such definitions of the said Roman Pontiff are of themselves unalterable and not from the consent of the Church" (4 Sess. chap. iv.).

It is needless to explain that this doctrine of papal infallibility does not include papal impeccability, nor does it include papal inerrancy in politics, or in science, or in any matters save those of faith and morals. One can readily appreciate what a compactness this doctrine gives to the whole system of Christian teaching. It is not only the broad and solid and unshakable foundation, but it is the cement that gives the bond to the whole superstructure. Catholics do not waver in their faith, they are not tortured with doubts, their spiritual life is not blighted by the withering blasts of infidelity, and the appeals to them do not consist in exhortations "to have faith," since the faith is never shaken, but they are appeals for better living and for higher spirituality.

Saints and Martyrs

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church is not only the source of her doctrinal inerrancy, but it is the active principle of the holiness of the Church that is manifested by the practice of heroic sanctity by many of her children, by the standards of morality which she sets up, and by the influence of her teaching in the social order. Whatever there is of Christian civilization is the work of the Roman Catholic Church. The long bead-roll of the saints, from the martyrs who died in the pagan Colosseum to the Father Damiens of today, who leave all that the world holds dear and sacrifice themselves in order to care for the sick and unfortunate, these are the fruits of the Holy Spirit, who is with her.

Undoubtedly there are many sincere and even devout Christians outside the pale of her membership, and these too are stimulated to heroism by the same Holy Spirit; but the natural and ordinary channels of the grace of God are the sacramental channels of the Catholic Church, which Christ established. As it is through the teaching authority personified in the Holy Father that the pastures of truth are preserved from the contamination of the poisonous weeds of error, so it is through the sacramental system that the streams of divine grace are sent to impart fertility and virility to the practical living of Christian men.

Grace may well be compared to that mysterious fluid which drives the trolley car. When the electricity is turned off the car is dark, and is stalled on the track; when it is turned on the car can move on its way and is brilliantly illuminated. So with the soul and divine grace. "Without Me ye can do nothing" (John xv. 5). There are seven different wires that carry each its own special grace to the soul. These are the Seven Sacraments. Each has a grace that does a special work.

The grace of Baptism regenerates. By means of it the child is born again into the newness of the supernatural

life. There are established between the soul and God relations of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father. Confirmation is a strengthening grace imparting such vigor of spirituality that one is led to fight for, and if necessary die for, the Faith that is in him. Penance is the forgiving grace. When one going down from Jerusalem to Jericho falls amidst the robbers of temptation, who despoil him of the mantle of purity and leave him naked of God's friendship and cast him aside from the pathways of righteousness, Penance, like the Good Samaritan, comes along and picks him up, binds up the wounds sin has made, cares for him during the period of convalescence until he is finally restored to spiritual health. Holy Eucharist is the nourishing grace. It is the real Body and Blood of Christ, which unless we eat thereof we cannot have life.

The Church's Care of Communicants

"Amen, amen, I say unto you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood you cannot have life in you, and he that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John vi. 54). It is the manna which has come down from heaven to support us spiritually while we wander through the deserts of this life into the Promised Land. Extreme Unction is the sustaining grace in that last fierce conflict with the evil one. When the weakness of dissolution has come and the cold sweats of death are on our brow, and the enemy of our soul makes a last determined effort to seize us, the grace of Extreme Unction fortifies us against his attacks and guards the soul in its upward flight until it gains its home in heaven. Then for the special states in life there are assisting graces: Holy Orders, to enable the priesthood to guard the sanctities of their office; and matrimony, to help the married pair to consecrate the love they have for each other, and enable them to bring up their children in the fear of God. Like a good mother, the Catholic Church takes the child in in-

fancy, watches over him as the years roll by, strengthens him to meet life's conflict; if he falls picks him up again; ever places before him the ideals of perfection, consecrates the great love passion of his heart, follows him to the end, and when his eyes are closed in death she lays his body with her blessing in the grave to await the resurrection day; while by her prayers and her suffrages she follows the soul into its place of purgation and does not leave it till the last traces of sin are washed away, and it is prepared for admittance in the realms of the blest. The continual flowing of these graces all through life from the cradle to the grave creates among Catholics types of sanctity that are known only to those whose eyes are so spiritualized that they can read the inner secret of hearts.

Standards of Holy Living

The lives of the saints constitute a literature rarely known outside the Catholic Church, and one that is replete with multiplied marvels of heroism. The continual flowing of these graces uplifts the general average of holiness, so that in convent and in cloister, among all ranks of society, under the mantle of the king and the rags of the beggar, there flourish the most beautiful flowers of sanctity.

The Catholic Church maintains the standards of holy living for all, by placing as conditions for admittance to Holy Communion a profession of profound sorrow for sin committed, joined with a determination never to sin again and a willingness to repair whatever injury has been done by sin. This is the very least that is exacted for full membership. Though if the sinner does not possess this he is not cast out. In the Church there are both good and bad. The cockle grows with the wheat; in the net there are both good and bad fishes. Like a good mother the Church is patient and loving with her disobedient children; though they do bring disgrace on her at times, still she claims them as her own and waits till the time comes when they are ready to meet her standards of holy living before she admits

them to the sacred table. But beyond these simple conditions of repentance there are no heights of sanctity and union with God to which she does not urge her children to aspire.

Indissolubility of Marriage Tie

Finally by the influence of her teaching in the social order she is the very saviour of society. She guards and protects the family by affirming the indissolubility of the marriage tie. She sets herself with all her mighty influence against the divorce abomination which is prostituting domestic virtue in our modern life. She interprets strictly the precept of Christ that "what God hath joined together let no man put asunder" (Matt. xix. 6). She has in this way saved the Christian home and all that it means of education and preservation to the growing child.

Moreover, she has maintained the highest ideals of chastity by singing the praises of the state of virginity, by encouraging her priesthood and thousands of her cloistered men and women to the highest practice of it. Thus in a most forceful way she says to the world that men and women may live without yielding to sensuality. The practical effect of this is felt throughout the entire married state, where people are taught restraint of passion and that a life of continence is among the easy possibilities.

Key to Labor Problems

She has in her hand the key to the labor problems which harass us. In this country particularly the scramble for wealth is going on with all its intensity. In the strife for pre-eminence many are thrown down and are trampled to the earth, others are cast by the wayside. The fierce striving for the biggest prize has made men disregard many human rights. Classes have been set over against the masses. Men have climbed to pre-eminence over the backs of their fellow men. The result of this social strife has

been the reducing of thousands to a slavery more galling than the Negro slavery of a century ago. Life is to many a child born into it but a damning fate. The segregation of wealth into the hands of the few has left the many in the grasp of a most distressful poverty, so that with all our wealth there is abroad the gaunt figure of want, and with our teeming markets the pitiful hand of beggary is stretched forth. There is only one remedy for these terrible social evils, and that is the religious one. The root of the social evil is in the cruel spirit of greed and of grasping avarice. No law can legislate this out of existence. No policeman's club can subdue it. To conquer it there is needed a power which reaches the heart. It must be a force which can turn men's minds away from the pleasures of life and bid them fix the desires of their souls on the greater riches beyond the grave. It must be an agency that spans the gulf that avarice has created between the rich and the poor; that can teach both the great principle of the brotherhood of man, the trusteeship of wealth, the dignity of labor, and the common destiny provided by a Heavenly Father for all.

Religion alone can do this. But to do it effectually a religion must be strong, and thoroughly organized. It must be one that is down among the poor commanding the love of their hearts. It must be one whose precepts can be enforced by spiritual penalties, if need be, by the sick-bed or even by the open grave. The Catholic Church can do all this in a most effectual way. She therefore is able to give the social *pax vobiscum* to the age. The Encyclical of Leo XIII on *The Condition of Labor* has been pronounced by noted publicists to be the Magna Charta of the rights and responsibilities of the wage-earners of the world.

The Catholic Church, then, is the very salt of the earth, saving it from corruption by vice and preserving it sweet and pure from the degenerating and decomposing action of evil.

Unity in Belief

The presence of the Holy Ghost with her makes her the world-wide religion—at home amidst every nation and tribe and people, no matter how much they differ in language, manners, and genius. The Latin language gives her a universal means of interchange of thought. The spiritual authority she possesses enables her to bring all minds into a complete unity of belief, so that wherever one finds a Catholic he is the exact duplicate in doctrinal life of every other Catholic. Ask a child in the Philippines the questions in his catechism, and one will get exactly the same answers as one would if he had the patience to go through and ask every one of the two hundred million Catholics scattered throughout the earth. In these days of crumbling creeds and of drifting away from old-time dogmatic moorings, the spectacle of a united Church homogeneous in its beliefs and uniform in its ethical exactions is something to charm the heart of man. Nothing but the compelling influence of the divine Presence can bring it about.

As to Remission of Sin

Not only is the Church everywhere the same, but it is perpetual in her life. She is today the only thing that goes back to classic civilization. She can affirm the inspiration of the Gospels, for she was present when they were written. She can assure us of the conversion of the European races, for she it was who brought it about. She can point to all the artistic treasures of the ages, to the great cathedrals of Europe, to the famous Madonnas of the art galleries, to the masterpieces of poetry and song, for it was she who inspired them all.

She has borne through the ages the apostolic privileges of the remission of sin in God's name. "As the **Father** hath sent Me, I also send you. When He had said **this He** breathed on them; and He said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven

them; whose sins you shall retain they are retained" (John xx. 23), and that other apostolic privilege of consecrating the bread and wine in the Sacrifice of the Mass and changing it into the Body and Blood of Christ (John vi. 52-56; Matt. xxvi. 28).

These two essential practices in the life of a Catholic—auricular confession for the purpose of receiving the forgiveness of sin, and sacramental Communion, in which not bread and wine but the real Body and Blood of Christ are received—are sustained by the exercise of the sacerdotal power which was given to the Apostles by Christ, and handed down in an unbroken succession through the generations of duly ordained bishops and priests unto their legitimate successors of the present day. The possession of these divine gifts establishes the identity between the Church of the first and the Church of the twentieth century, and constitutes in the Catholic Church of today the apostolic succession.

Common Beliefs of All Christians

I have endeavored in the foregoing to make a simple exposition of the constitution of the Catholic Church, and explain what her doctrines and practices are, as they arise out of her very nature as a world-wide and perpetual institution destined to carry the effects of the Redemption through all ages, even to the consummation of the world, and make them operative in the hearts of men. There are many other distinctive beliefs of Roman Catholics which it is only possible to hint at. The common beliefs of all Christians, the existence of one God in three divine persons, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the fall of man from the state of original justice, his redemption and regeneration through the vicarious sacrifice of the God-man, the ultimate resurrection of man's body, the particular as well as the final judgment, and the various states of being in the world beyond the grave, are enshrined in the formulas which have been adopted by the Catholic Church. In Catholic theolo-

gies all these truths are delineated with all the exactness of a scientific study; and the reasons from the authority of Sacred Scripture, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, as well as from reason, are given. But the few distinctive beliefs which I may touch on are the devotion to the Virgin Mary, the custom of praying for the dead, the belief in Purgatory, the Intercession of the Saints, and the celebration of the divine mysteries.

Distinctive Teachings

In the devotion to the Virgin Mary we honor her only with the honor due to a creature, we believe that her influence with her divine Son is still powerful and may be exercised in our behalf.

She is the Mother of the Man-God. She conceived through the overshadowing influence of the Holy Ghost. She was always a virgin, and in view of the foreseen merits of her divine Son she herself was preserved from all stain of original sin, which is the common heritage of all the children of Adam. By this latter privilege we understand the Immaculate Conception.

Purgatory is a place where they go who die with some lesser stain of sin on their souls, and where by suffering it is purged away, preparatory to admission into heaven. The Church teaches concerning Purgatory two points: first, that there is a Purgatory, and second, that souls detained there are helped by our prayers. Hell is a state of eternal separation from God. There are no definitions of the Church concerning the character of the punishment there. It is of Catholic Faith, however, that hell is eternal. The saints are they who have fought the good fight and are now reigning with God. Owing to their intimacy with God on the one hand and their sympathy with us on the other, they become powerful pleaders with the divine Majesty. There is, however, but one mediator between the soul and God, and He is Christ Jesus. Nothing is farther from the Catholic mind than to supplant Him by any one else. The

Mass is the clean oblation foretold by the prophet Malachias, that would be offered up from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same (Mal. i. 11). It is the sacrifice of the Cross offered through the ages as a constant propitiation for sin, in which Christ is immolated again, though in an unbloody manner, and by means of which the justice of God is condoned and the sins of men are satisfied for.

All these various dogmas are parts of, yet essential to the complete system of Catholic teaching, and they are the framework of that beautiful organism which derives its life from the indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost, and has been the ark of salvation to myriads of the children of men.

He said to them: "Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Matt. xvi. 15).

"Now when they had heard these things, they had compunction in their heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles: What shall we do, men and brethren? But Peter said to them: Do penance and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts ii. 14-41).

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