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COME ON
IN!



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by

RICHARD GINDER



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HAVE you ever thought of becoming a Catholic? That's being pretty blunt, but it's a fair question and there's no harm in asking . . .

We Catholics are convinced that our Church is a "natural," that she satisfies the heart, that she can pour her comfort into the deepest chinks and corners of our soul, that she has an answer for our every problem.

Have you ever tried reading up a little on the Catholic Church — from Catholic sources? We have some very readable

little works, and you can have them at any Catholic priest's house practically for the asking — or at a Catholic book shop, or perhaps in the public library: books like Cardinal Gibbons' *Faith of Our Fathers*, John A. O'Brien's *Faith of Millions*, Karl Adams' *Spirit of Catholicism*.

Or just step inside the door of any Catholic church and you are likely to find a rack with a variety of pamphlets on every subject.

But please don't get the idea that Catholicism is too complicated — that it involves endless instructions and the reading of fat books. The essentials of our Faith are contained in a slender leaflet: the catechism. That defines the limits of our beliefs. One learns, without necessarily memorizing, the little answers to the questions put there. Once the inquirer has understood and accepted everything within those few pages, he is ready for reception into the

Church, and he may be sure that nothing will ever be proposed to his belief beyond what he has already learned.

Faith, by which we mean acceptance of these things on God's word, is His gift. No amount of reading can give it to us. We can appreciate the arguments and understand the theory of Catholic belief, and still be lacking in that complete and wholehearted dependence on God's word. Faith comes from the asking for it. Faith isn't given to the proud man. It comes to those who are not too big to kneel.

The Catholic Church — Powerful and Holy

If you become a Catholic, you will associate yourself with the largest, most ancient, most powerful religious organization in the world. You will share in the prayers of the Church in this world and in heaven. You will feel a broadening, an

expansion of your supernatural horizons. You will be able to worship God in the solemnity and the magnificence of a ritual as old as Christianity itself. Our Holy Father will become your Holy Father. You will be throwing yourself heart and soul into an organized movement, world-wide, for unity, for peace, and for justice. Don't you want all this? It's yours for the asking.

If you are a Mason, or belong to some other fraternal order, you will join a much larger fraternity in entering the Church. Catholics have a spiritual home in practically every city and town on the face of the earth. Wherever you go, you will find a Catholic church with its familiar altar, with its friendly statues and pictures, and with the faithful lamp burning to show that you are in God's home, that Jesus is present on the altar.

Mass in Calcutta this morning was no different from the Mass your own Catholic

pastor offered at your parish altar this morning. It never changes. The same Latin, the same vestments, the same ritual is used everywhere. If you accustom yourself to Mass in your own parish church, you will be at home in Paris, Berlin or Melbourne.

Is it any wonder that ours is the Church of Saints? — of St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Ignatius, St. Philip, and an army of other holy men and women? We have the instruments of holiness in our Church. We teach the complete Gospel of our Lord, written and unwritten; we have not five, not three sacraments, but seven — the full number specified by Christ. We forgive sins and give men a fresh start in holiness; we nourish their souls on the Bread of Life; we call on the Blessed Mother and the saints to help us; we pattern our lives after theirs. We use pictures and medals to remind us of them. If they have fought

the fight and won, we can, too! We do not battle by ourselves. We are one with millions of our fellow-Catholics, with the angels and saints, helping one another, extending our hand to one another, in the battle for everlasting life.

Now you regard Christian art just as so much of the beautiful. What a different outlook we have Notre Dame, Chartres, Rheims, Cologne — these are more than architectural masterpieces; these are palaces thrown up to house the Treasure of the Faithful! The painting and sculpture of the Renaissance become symbols of fervent devotion. It was not art alone that guided Raphael's brush in painting the Sistine Madonna. No, it was more than that. It was a deep and consuming love for the Virgin Mother of God. El Greco was not painting for the critics; he was dedicating his work to the service of the altar.

What more could you ask of any re-

ligion? We give you the constant presence of God. We give you the love of the best Mother you ever had: Mary. We give you a whole family of saints to inspire you, to keep you company. We give you the Masses and prayers of 300,000 priests and many more good nuns and religious. We give you the most impressive ritual mankind has ever known — our candles, music, incense, flowers, and rich vestments, these are what we use to ornament the sacrifice of our Lord's body and blood.

Can't you see that in becoming a Catholic you would only be returning to the Church of your ancestors? The faith of our fathers is the faith of your fathers, too. In becoming a Catholic you would only be "going home." The Catholic Church was old when Europe was still savage. It was ancient when America was discovered. The Catholic Church had been saving souls 1,500 years before the first Protestant was born.

Everything to Gain

You have everything to gain and nothing to lose. This is your Church, your rightful home, of which you have been deprived through mistaken leadership. These are your sacraments; it is your Mass; your Blessed Mother. The incense and candles and music; the saints, the unity with Catholics in heaven, in purgatory, and on earth — it is all yours. What have you to lose?

It is true that some misguided people do not regard our Church as fashionable. We don't require top-hats and cutaways at the Sunday High-Mass. We do not keep a man out for lack of a bath or for arrears in pew-rent.

Should you become a Catholic, how would your friends react? — I think you would be surprised. The great majority would mind their own business; a minority would comment, but in a polite way, and

to express happiness at your having settled your mind in matters religious; an odious few would try to argue you out of your "superstition."

What about business? If you are a professional man, physician, lawyer, or teacher, a change in religious affiliation will do no harm as long as you keep on being a good physician, a good lawyer, or a good teacher, in every sense of the term. If you are a merchant, the public does not care what you are, Catholic, Jew or Protestant, as long as you sell good merchandise. Anyway — "What does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?"¹

Or, you may be a little hesitant about the idea of a change. You are used to the Protestant type of service, hymn, Scripture-lesson, anthem, and sermon. You can see some point to Catholic claims, but you are

1. Mt. XVI, 26.

afraid to press the inquiry any farther lest you be convinced and be thrown into bad faith about your present affiliation. To be a Catholic means confession, Mass, and a lot of "strange" practices which can be defended one by one but which, taken together, constitute Roman Catholicism and a well nigh alien land.

But look: first of all, you dare not slight God's truth for expediency. Once your convictions have been disturbed, you're bound to settle them; you're bound to search out the truth and, having found the truth, you are bound to bring your life into conformity with it. Any other course of action is damnable hypocrisy. — "He who hears you, hears Me; and he who rejects you, rejects Me."² — You are safe as long as you are convinced that Christ is speaking to the world through the ministry of your own denomination. But once

2. Lk X, 16.

you begin to wonder about that, then you are really bound before God to learn just who it is you are hearing and rejecting.

Others Have Done It: Why Not You?

Secondly: it is not nearly so hard becoming a Catholic as you imagine. In 1947 exactly 115,214 adults in the country alone made the change after mature consideration. Remember Heywood Broun and Knute Rockne; G. K. Chesterton and Ronald Knox; Carlton Hayes and Daniel Sargent; Sheila Kaye-Smith, Sigrid Undset, John Moody, Joyce Kilmer, Alfred Noyes, Clare Booth Luce — these are only a few of the people who came in with a splash of publicity. There was many a small shop-keeper, received, and many a plumber, molder, and day-laborer. We do not get 115,000 intellectuals in one year nor 115,000 illiterates either. That total is a fair cross section of contemporary America

— all of them men and women who took the plunge you are now contemplating. They lost nothing and gained everything.

Thirdly: You have "Catholic blood" in you. Your ancestors were once Catholics. They must have been. There were no Protestants before 1517. Someone made the change once in your family, so that no one has grounds for talking about his "traditional Protestantism." Yours was once a Catholic name.

How does one become a Catholic? Do we lead a man up and introduce him to the congregation in the middle of the Sunday High-Mass? Not at all. A convert is received privately after careful instruction. First, he takes an oath rejecting previous errors and swearing belief in the Catholic creed. Then he is baptized conditionally; that is, the priest says, "If thou are not baptized, I baptize thee . . ." No one need witness this except the god-parents you have chosen.

If you should feel especially shy or sen-

sitive in the matter of becoming a Catholic, we would do everything in our power to help you keep your conversion a secret. We are not bound to wear our religion on our hat-band.

All you have to do is to get in touch with a priest. You can do it through a Catholic friend by having him make an appointment for you or introduce you to some priest; or, better, you can telephone, or rap at the rectory door yourself. You will find the priest very obliging in the matter of arranging instructions — for you will need a little personal coaching and, on your own part, you will have a question or two to ask. The number and duration of the instructions will depend on various factors. The priest will do the right thing. Depend on that.

No Harm in “Just Looking”

You need not commit yourself in taking the instructions. You might tell the priest

that you just want to know more about his Church, without saying anything at all about joining. Then at the end, if you remained unconvinced, you could simply retreat with all good grace.

It is also possible to investigate our faith and worship by mail, in the privacy of your home. A short, yet complete and interesting course of instruction, which can be fitted into the busiest life, is yours for the asking. The book is written in conversational form, and there are six tests to be filled out. These will be competently corrected, enabling you to determine how well you understood the instruction and on what points you may require further explanation by mail.

If this is more to your liking, write to:

THE CATHOLIC INFORMATION SOCIETY

214 West 31st Street

New York 1, N. Y.

This involves no cost or obligation on your part.

One last word: pray, pray in this fashion: "God, that I may see the truth and have the strength to accept it!" — "God, grant that I may see the Catholic Church as you see it." Stop in as you are passing your next Catholic Church. It will be open. Make it the occasion of a prayer for religious truth.

**If I am right Thy grace impart
Still in that right to stay.
If I am wrong, then give me heart
To find a better way.**

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