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REV. MICHAEL X. FRASSRAND, C.S.P.



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*By*

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# The Catholic Church Is Holy!

By REV. MICHAEL X. FRASSRAND, C.S.P.

Do you believe there is ammunition stored away in Catholic Church basements? Do you believe that Catholics are plotters of evil and that their Church is a menace to peaceful society? Do you believe that Catholic institutions are disreputable and immoral? Do you believe that the Pope is the Antichrist and the Catholic Church the mother of sin?

Beliefs of this sort are found only among persons who know little or nothing about the Catholic Church. They are the victims of a four hundred year old crusade of bitter denunciation and hatred of all things Catholic. In our day of enlightenment one might think that these scarecrows of the past would have been swept into oblivion. Yet by some power of survival they have remained to frighten some good people, and keep them away from the Church of Christ.

## The Profits of Slander

Persecution of the Church has been a profitable enterprise. Without doubt much of the bitterness against her is kept alive precisely because it is a source

of revenue for unprincipled pockets. During one of my missions, a non-Catholic, who came to listen, told of having attended a recent revival. The revivalist, according to his story, said little about Catholics during the early part of the week and reserved this subject for the night of the "big collection." The subject was well advertised and a large crowd gathered to hear it. This non-Catholic confessed with shame that the revivalist had him so worked-up and infuriated against Catholics that he borrowed ten dollars to put in the basket to help "beat off the Catholics." It is evident that there was no religious purpose in the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. An idea was created in an unscrupulous brain. The creator got rich on membership fees and from the sale of paraphernalia. The old scarecrow was raised, and timid men poured dollars into the official treasury.

Anti-Catholicism has worked like a charm as a money-making proposition. Ex-Catholics have taken advantage of former membership in the Church to clothe slander in the cloak of authority. Ex-Catholics have sold their hate for money. They have been hired, put under contract, given publicity managers, and worked on a percentage basis. Hence the ex-nun, the ex-priest, and the so-called "converted Catholic." Many lecturers who are advertised as ex-Catholics

are frauds, and the past history of others would not bear investigation. Unfortunately, the atmosphere of experience with which they surround themselves, fascinates many listeners, and few go to the trouble of looking up the record of a lecturer. I do not mean that all preachers of the gospel of hate have succeeded. Some have fled in shame when their records were exposed; and others have gone to jail for libel.

### A Holy Church

In spite of this long-continued campaign of bitterness to which many upstanding people have mistakenly subscribed, the Catholic Church is holy and has a remarkable record of holiness among its members. If I can convince you that this is a holy Church, laboring with the approval of Christ, I need not waste time challenging the many accusations you may have heard. A holy Church has a divine right to labor among souls, to preach Christ and to admonish man. A holy Church disproves every calumny and establishes itself as an instrument of God.

### Saints

We do not contend that all Catholics are holy; we do not claim that all are good. We are ready to admit that some Catholics disgrace Christianity. About

these I will speak later. First, let us consider the members of the Church who have reached the highest degree of perfection known on this earth. We call them the saints. A saint is one whom the Church declares "worthy of heaven." Canonization, the procedure by which a person is declared a saint is not an offhand judgment. It is a pronouncement based upon most careful and comprehensive investigation. I will make no attempt to describe the procedure at length. Briefly, however, it is this: A multitude of Catholics whose attention has been attracted by some individual and who are convinced that his life has been unusually holy, petition the Pope to declare him a saint. This popular demand results in the appointment of a court whose duty it is to gather, and to make a thorough, searching study of all the evidence. No fact, however trifling it may appear, is overlooked or disregarded, particularly if it casts doubt on the belief that the man or woman concerned has led an unusually holy life. If there are any still living who knew him they are called upon to give testimony under oath, and they are carefully cross-examined. Whatever the reputed saint has written, what he has said and done, what has been written or said about him by those who were in contact with him is compiled, studied, discussed. That nothing shall be taken for



granted, or lightly admitted, or given undue importance, a keen-minded critic, spoken of as the Devil's Advocate, is appointed to show the weakness, the irrelevancy, the inadequacy of testimony in support of the belief that the man was a saint. He is also bound in the strictest and most solemn way to dig up and to present as cogently as possible every shred of unfavorable evidence. Nor is this all. Heaven itself is invoked. Miracles must be wrought before the Church will even seriously consider the request that the man or woman in question be declared a saint. And even miracles are not sufficient evidence for the Church to consider the case closed. At first she will say no more than that the alleged saint may be venerated as a servant of God. After that there must be a second and a third judicial review of the whole case, with new miracles. When they have been substantiated the servant of God is declared, first blessed, and finally saint. So slow is the Church in all these steps, so strict, so exacting, that she seems almost determined to exclude new candidates from this Roll of Honor. Certainly no new name is added until the most rigid tests have been met triumphantly.

A saint therefore is not merely a good person, but one who practices virtue in a heroic degree. A saint

is one who loves God above all things and who is actuated in all things by that profound love.

### St. Francis

Let us look at a saint, one whom the world loves—St. Francis of Assisi. What made him a saint? He was the son of a rich merchant who was of the nobility. In those days the sons of noblemen lived in luxury and were conspicuous for idleness. In early manhood, Francis caught the spirit of Christ, Who was poor and Who made Himself useful. With a generosity that seemed reckless, he bestowed on the poor and needy the money and even the clothing that his father freely gave him for himself. His father remonstrated; became angry; threatened to disinherit him. Francis replied by casting his rich garments at his father's feet, by giving up all the luxuries he had previously enjoyed, by sacrificing the comforts of his boyhood home, by associating with the poor and by sharing their hard lot with a smiling face, a cheerful, joyous mien. He was called a fool, mocked, derided, scorned. But he was a fool for the sake of Christ. He became a living model of that poverty which Christ taught and exemplified. The world of that time needed such a lesson. Francis rose to the occasion. By his example and his words he persuaded others to join his

holy crusade against the worship of wealth and display. Poverty was restored to its proper dignity. A great Order of men and another of women took the vow of poverty under the leadership of this poor man of Assisi, poor for the love of Christ. They are known as Franciscans.

Thus did he show that he was no ordinary Christian, satisfied with routine virtue and content with merely keeping out of trouble. His was heroic sanctity, the kind that the ordinary Christian is afraid even to try. No wonder the Church calls him a saint, for Francis was a saint.

### St. Therese

Turn now to one more recent. Some sixty years ago Therese Martin was born. She died at the age of twenty-four. Close on half of her life was spent behind convent walls. In her childhood home and in the convent she did nothing that seemed extraordinary. Yet when Therese wrote her autobiography—at the command of her superiors—the story of her soul was so captivating that her name went swiftly around the world. Christians everywhere paid her honor. “Therese is a saint” was the popular cry. With little delay proceedings toward her canonization began. Investigation brought out more clearly the

sweetness, beauty and holiness of her life. Childlike simplicity was her outstanding virtue. Christ had said: "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter into it" (Mark x. 15). Therese retained the spirit of childhood to the end. Her obedience remained perfect, her trust in her superiors complete. She performed simple duties, simply, for the love of Christ, and gave the world the "little way" to heaven. She was a living fulfillment of Christ's teaching: "Unless you become as little children" (Matt. xviii. 3). Age that produces wrinkles as well as independence was spared her. Therese died young, but in her few years she had achieved much. She was not an ordinary Christian soul, but one that lived for God alone—a saint.

### Many Saints

Of such as these there are thousands on the Church's Roll of Honor. The mere list of their names makes a large volume. They have come from every Catholic land, from every walk of life. Popes, bishops and priests, kings and queens, rich men and poor, statesmen, scholars, soldiers, lawyers, physicians, consecrated virgins, mothers of families, laborers, servants, and even slaves, have been given that title of honor and glory by the Church; not, as is plain, because of

their position or wealth, or for any other earthly, human consideration; not because they led ordinarily good lives, but because they rose high above average standards, and were heroic in their loving devotion to God and to their fellow men.

The Church and her children have not been alone in giving them this recognition. All men who have taken pains to become acquainted with their lives and deeds, and have power to perceive true nobility of character, agree in that verdict.

### Guided By the Church

Permit me to point out that the men and women whose sanctity no informed man calls into question, were all children of the Catholic Church. She was their teacher. It was she who spoke to them of Christ, who kindled in them a living, active, abiding faith in His every word; who inspired them to take Him as their Master and their model; who pointed out to them His way and kept their feet from wandering; who sustained them when they were weak; who refreshed their souls with His sacraments when they were spent and weary; who, in one word, made them what they were. They are her fruits. By them she should be judged. They were faithful and true to

her. They called her their Holy Mother. Their testimony is true and should be heeded.

## Martyrs

A religion that can produce martyrs is real. Who is a martyr? A martyr is one who sheds his blood for Christ. He is one who accepts death for Christ rather than save his life as a traitor. Usually the death of a martyr is hard and painful. There is no hatred quite so brutal as that which is directed against religion. For Christ men have been stoned to death, flogged till their bones were stripped of flesh, dragged over rough roads behind chariots, slowly crushed under heavy weights, roasted over slow fires, gored by the horns of savage bulls, torn to pieces by beasts, pulled apart by wild horses, nailed to crosses and left to die of thirst and pain. No one will ever know the number of martyrs furnished heaven by the Catholic Church. Records of such killings are not kept by the perpetrators. But in every age the Church has had its martyrs, from the day of Stephen, the first martyr, to the day of the Bolshevik in Russia and the Communist in Spain. In every land in which the Gospel of Christ has been preached there have been martyrs, if not when the seeds of truth were being sown, then later, when the enemies of Christ strove to destroy

true faith in Him. The soil of every country has been made sacred by the blood of martyrs.

### Given Courage By the Church

The religion of a martyr must be real. Sometimes indeed a man may die for an evil cause, for a false religion, out of pride, or when even the recanting of his error will not save him. Such was not the case with the martyrs. Mere outward conformity with the demands of their judges would have saved most of them. Why did they not yield and take that easy road to comfort, to prosperity, and to the favor of princes? Every martyr standing before his enemies bore witness to the deep conviction that life here is little compared to life hereafter. He needed courage to remain loyal to Christ under such circumstances. Where did those thousands and tens of thousands get that deep conviction and that heroism? They were all trained by the Church, they were her children. The knowledge they had of Christ, the faith they had in Him and in His words, their confidence in His promises, their love of Him their joyful readiness to die rather than deny Him, or even pretend to deny Him, their stanch loyalty amid the torments, their dying prayers for their murderers—all these things, and all the virtuous practices of their everyday life, were the

ripened grain of her planting. If the Church were Antichrist would she have taught her children to believe in Him? to trust Him? to love Him? to leave father and mother, brother and sister for Him? to give up possessions, honors, home and life itself for His sake? If she were a Babylon of sin would she have had, could she have had, such saints as Francis of Assisi, the Little Flower, and a host of other holy men and women who followed closely after Christ and mirrored His sanctity in their lives? If she were unholy could she be the mother of innumerable saints? One does not know what human holiness is, nor how much men may come to be like God, and His Son Jesus Christ, until one knows the martyrs and saints of the Catholic Church. One must enter into their lives, penetrate the secrets of their hearts, and see the thorough love of God which motivates their actions. There one beholds the highest and holiest expression of religion upon earth. The Church that begets and trains them is noble in its purpose, pure in its teachings, and faithful to Christ. She is the Bride of the Lamb.

### Sinners

But are there not sinners in the Church? Sinners? Yes! The Church has its unworthy members, and



no one is more ready to point an accusing finger at them than the Church herself. Many notorious gangsters and other criminals were once Catholics. Perhaps even yet they claim to belong to her. Perhaps the Church herself has not utterly cast them off, though their lives are a daily defiance of her teachings and her laws. Is their wickedness to be charged against the Church? Is she responsible for it? They are murderers; has the Church counseled murder or condoned it? They are bandits; has the Church recommended violence and robbery? They are blasphemers, liars, drunkards, lustful beasts. Has the Church taught them these vices, encouraged them in these abominable practices, made light of these outrages against God and man? Has she not preached respect for God, truthfulness, sobriety, and everything else that is good and clean, in season and out of season? Has she not denounced all that is evil, foul, depraved, sensual and sinful, all her days and everywhere? I do not need to answer those questions for you; you know the answer. Well then, is it fair to blame her for what she unreservedly condemns? To hold her responsible for what she strives to prevent? Perhaps you will answer that her inability to stop sin is the very proof that she is not of God and is not holy. Let us see.

## Man Is Free

Every man is endowed with free will. He has the power to choose between good and evil. Were it otherwise he could not have any merit before God. He chooses his own line of conduct. A saint can become a despicable sinner. God Himself will not prevent that transition. He will not take from any man the original gift of freedom. Neither will the Church. For that matter she cannot taken from any man his liberty. God and His Church alike are helpless before a stubborn, perverse, human will.

## Judas a Proof

Christ the Son of God chose Judas to be an Apostle. At the outset he must have been a fairly respectable man. We can scarcely imagine Jesus calling a thief or one who was otherwise wicked to be one of His associates and Apostles. Now, Judas spent three years under the direction of Christ. He listened to the Beatitudes; he heard his Master's scathing denunciation of hypocrisy; he heard the parables of the Kingdom of Heaven; he knew something about hellfire from Christ's word-picture of its intensity and duration. Judas saw Christ at prayer, and was himself taught how to pray. He saw Jesus cure the sick and raise the dead.

It may seem very strange, but Judas became a sinner under that guidance. Called to be an Apostle and destined for eternal glory had he remained faithful, he followed his own path, down and down until Christ at last called him a devil. He was a free man. Christ was powerless to break or to bend his will. Do you call that a failure on the part of Christ? Do you point a finger of scorn at Him because of Judas? Not at all! Christ could not force that man into heaven. To hold Him responsible for that man's loss would be to ignore the divine purpose and plan in the creation and endowment of man.

### Church Also Powerless

The Church cannot do more than Christ. If a Catholic chooses a course of evil, the Church is helpless. She can give him instruction, advice, the grace of the sacraments. He can refuse them all. In so doing he no more discredits the Church than the traitorous disciple discredited Christ.

### Why Not Excommunicate Sinners?

From some points of view it may seem advisable to keep the Church free of sinners. Inveterate sinners could be refused admittance to Church services. They could be denied the sacraments. We could even

resort to public excommunication of all those who give scandal and bring disgrace upon the whole flock. We could keep the good and dismiss all the bad. In theory that may sound reasonable. Practically it is wrong. It is out of keeping with the purpose of the Church, and contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ. Such procedure would mean the loss of souls. Some of the greatest saints in heaven were once grievous sinners. By such a policy Margaret of Cortona, a great penitent, would have been abandoned to the flames of hell. Patience with her gave heaven a magnificent soul, and our sinful world a model of repentance. Such a policy would have kept Augustine out of the Church, and probably out of the Kingdom of Heaven. But, because the Church would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, she saved for the world a leader and for heaven one of its greatest saints.

### Good Grain and Cockle

Our Blessed Saviour did not advise the wholesale excommunication of the unworthy. The parable of the good seed and the cockle tells us His wish in this regard. "The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field. But while men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed

cockle among the wheat and went his way. And when the blade was sprung up and had brought forth fruit, then appeared also the cockle. And the servants of the good man of the house coming said to him: Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? Whence then hath it cockle? And he said to them: An enemy hath done this. And the servants said to him: Wilt thou that we go and gather it up? And he said: No, lest perhaps gathering up the cockle, you root up the wheat also together with it. Suffer both to grow until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers: Gather up first the cockle and bind it into bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into my barn” (Matt. xiii. 24-30).

This parable is one of three found close together in St. Matthew’s Gospel. All three concern the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, the Church of Christ. He Himself explained this one: “He that soweth the seed is the son of man. The field is the world. The good seed are the children of the Kingdom. The cockle are the children of the wicked one. The enemy is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world. The reapers are the angels” (Matt. xiii. 37, 38).

The meaning of this parable is plain: there will be both good and wicked people in the Church. We must not try to root out the wicked lest we uproot

also the good. They must be allowed to grow together until the last day. Then the angels of God will gather out of His Kingdom all scandals and all those that work iniquity, and will cast them into the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

### Church Heeds This Instruction

The Church, therefore, does not root out of herself, and cast utterly away any sinner, even those who are a scandal to others. At most she withholds from them until they repent the privileges of union with herself. In case they show real signs of sorrow, for which she waits and prays, she clasps them to her heart. She cannot act otherwise, for the wish of Christ is her law of life.

The Church exists for sinners even more than for saints. Christ came to this world to save sinners. He did not abandon them, nor irrevocably close against them the gate of heaven. He appealed to them; proved the depth of His love for them; and tried to win them to everlasting life. So, too, the Church. Her commission is to win over the sinner to the Kingdom of God. There would have been no great penitents had the Church followed a different course during her long history. Ordinary sinners

would have been discouraged, and even good people would have lived in great fear had the Church pursued a policy of having nothing to do with the weak and sinful. With Christ the Church tries to get and keep hold of them, wins some of them back to God, and lets the others go their way till the time of the harvest.

### **Good People**

Enough about the sinners, since after all there are many good people near at hand. As a matter of conviction I say that most Catholics are good. Many of them are living saints. In a large city where there is supposed to be much sin and crime you can find sanctity. There you will see old men and old women hurrying along the streets to be at a six o'clock Mass on time. You will see young men and young women spending a half hour at Mass on their way to the office, or the shop, in the early morning. You will find multitudes attending faithfully some devotion. All day long you will find Catholic people in their churches, visiting Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, telling their beads, making the Way of the Cross. They are keeping close to Christ, lifting up their hearts in prayer that they may obtain His Grace

without which no man can please God. They do not ask in vain, nor does Christ bestow His gifts on them in vain. Quietly, without attracting attention, refreshed and strengthened they go forth to play their part in the warfare of life. The world lays snares for them and seeks to entangle them. Evil spirits lie in wait to seduce or to frighten them. Godless men, laughing at virtue, scoffing at meekness, humility and patience, deriding childlike trust in God, setting up standards of selfishness, self-indulgence, self-sufficiency, and pride, sometimes openly and of set purpose, sometimes silently and without design, daily give battle to the wisdom and holiness of Christ, and daily exert powerful influence against Him in the hearts and minds of other men. Against all these enemies of Christ, these forces of evil, the soldier of Christ must hold the citadel of his own soul. It is a stern, unending battle of whose dangers Catholics are more vividly conscious than other men, and to whose demands they are generally more responsive. I will not say that they are all good soldiers. Though the spirit be willing, the flesh is weak. But I will say, and every priest will say, out of an experience and knowledge of the human heart, which no other men can equal or even approach, that not many of them become traitors to Christ, desert His ranks, or throw



down their arms. Stumbling, tripping, falling, they rise again, struggling onward, and at last by the Grace of God reach the goal of their vocation in Christ Jesus.

### Holy Teachings

So little do those outside of her pale realize the part of the Church in this warfare of life, so misled are they by appearances and by malicious misrepresentation that I must say to you again, and insistently, that she is in every way a Holy Church, no matter how many of her children, whether in high places or low, whether prominent or obscure, may fall into sin and deny the Christ Who bought them with His Blood. Those that are unfaithful to Him and recreant to His will are unfaithful to her and recreant to her laws. They that are against Christ are against her. No teaching of hers, no practice, no law, no counsel is conducive to sin, or an encouragement to loose living, or an approval of low standards. Her critics have vainly sought defects in her teaching and flaws in her discipline. A whole-hearted acceptance of her doctrines and unfaltering obedience to her guidance make frail humanity holy, and lead men straight to God.

## Too Much Preaching About Sin!

Nowadays indeed the world's criticism of the Church is the reverse of its former charges. Once she was accused as the mother of sin and a Babylon of Iniquity. Now she is accused of finding sin where there is none; of denouncing as evil what is innocent, right and good. The world today dislikes that word "sin." It has a tendency to think nothing sinful except poor sportsmanship and breaches of good manners. It is angry because the Church persists in branding as evil and as a sin against God much that the world tolerates and even approves. It tries to cry her down as antiquated, medieval, hopelessly behind the times, and a barrier in the way of enlightenment and progress. This outcry does not disturb the Church. She knows in Whom she believes, and on Whom she rests securely. She knows that His words will not pass away; and so she preaches His Gospel in season and out of season, to the unbelieving as well as to the believing world.

### Secret Teachings

To some it seems incredible that the Church means what she says. I have been asked by non-Catholics if we have not secret teachings, whispered to Cath-

olics and kept from everybody else—one set of doctrines proclaimed in public—a different behind doors. Is not such a thought absurd? How could any doctrine made known to four hundred million people be kept secret? Would not some of them innocently, ignorantly, or forgetfully betray the secret? Would not some, out of a sense of honor, out of a hatred of hypocrisy, proclaim the fraud and denounce its authors? There have been apostates from the Church by the thousands. They have not all come from the ranks of the unlearned. Many have been well educated. They are graduates of Catholic schools, colleges and even seminaries. Some were students for the priesthood and had gone almost all the way to the Altar of God. Some had even offered up the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and administered the sacraments of the Church, and preached in her pulpits. There have been, there are ex-priests and ex-nuns, men and women who were once within the innermost and holiest precincts of the Church. What a boon for them were there really secret teachings that they could reveal to the world. What a joy for them could they allege and prove that the Church is two-faced and hypocritical! What a glorious triumph if they could offer that as the explanation of their apostasy, instead of the conceited, flimsy, shabby, puerile, and even ly-

ing excuses they have given! Why have they not tried to vindicate their conduct in this way? Simply because there is no secret Catholic teaching. We have nothing to hide; we hide nothing. On the contrary, we use every available means to make our teachings known. We publish them in books; we print them in magazines and newspapers, in leaflets and pamphlets; we discuss them in public; we invite questions about them. No doctrine, no law, no claim, no practice of the Church is closed against inquiry. No question concerning any one of these things is ignored or left unanswered. Our answers are plain, direct, frank, and as complete as time and other blameless limitations permit. We do not answer in whispers nor behind closed doors. We speak out clearly, and we invite even those who are against us to listen. We want the world to hear and know what we have to say. In fact we go to tremendous expense and labor to acquaint all men with our beliefs. We are not ashamed of our Gospel which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Rather we proudly point it out as the foundation of good living and the school of exalted virtue. The moral code of the Church is the straight and narrow path that leads to Eternal Life.

## The Foundation of Friendship

Our dearest wish is to have you know the truth about our religion. Most of the criticism directed against it, most of the distrust and hatred shown toward it by well-meaning Christians, is due to the fact that they do not know, but misunderstand it grievously. A sound, true knowledge of it, we are convinced, will banish misgivings and fears from their minds, will uproot whatever there may be of bitterness or hatred from their hearts, and will break the ground for that sympathetic understanding which will lead them to love us a little, and our religion with all the affection which is due to Jesus Christ.



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