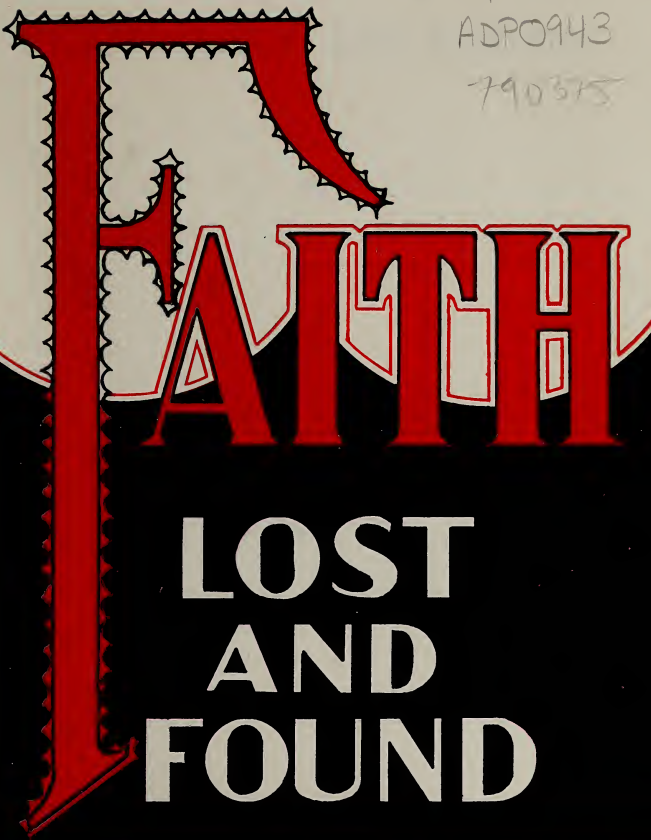


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FAITH

**LOST
AND
FOUND**

REV. JAMES FENLON FINLEY, C.S.P.

FAITH: LOST AND FOUND

By

JAMES F. FINLEY, C.S.P.



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The following story is a unity, woven from the letters and chats I have had with many lapsed Catholics, who have returned to the practice of their Faith. No one person is the source of the complete story; all the people to whom I spoke or wrote passed through some part of it. Rather than attempt a mere classification of problems, I decided to synthesize all the information and tell it as the story of one person.

JAMES F. FINLEY, C.S.P.





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"FAITH: LOST AND FOUND"

I feel like beginning this story with a deep sigh of relief because I've just had a very close call; I almost lost my Faith. I say "almost," because I guess no one ever really loses his Faith. A person may move very close to the possibility of losing it, but as long as he is alive, there is always a spark that can be ignited. At the ripe old age of twenty-nine, I'm doing a little rekindling job on the spark of Faith that remained in me after a careless life. I have a long way to go before I am completely established in my return to God; but wherever I am, now, in relation to Him, I pray I never slip as far as I did when I lived as "lost" to Faith.

All that I write in my story can be reduced to a pattern. I've discovered seven steps to unbelief and they match as I check them against my life. They are not "steps" in the sense that you move from one to another, though there is a certain progress through them by a lax Catholic. They are, rather, characteristics which can be discovered in each rejection of God that any soul makes. For the lapsed Catholic, they are obvious points that can be found as you

analyze his failure. Each of the fallen-away's sins, and the whole story of his supposed unbelief, carry the stamp of these seven points. From time to time, from phase to phase of "losing Faith," one or other of the points may be highlighted; but, all of them are present in the single sin or the total defection against God and His Church.

Pattern of Loss

Before I go into the story of my Faith, lost and found, suppose I set down what I formulated as the pattern of laxness. I think I drifted (and many people drift)—from Faith and Church according to this frame:

- 1—I had no grasp of my PURPOSE in life. The fact of why God MADE ME had not registered. Self-service was the only purpose I admitted.
- 2—I did not understand my religion. The depth and yet, the clarity of my Church's truth was unknown to me. I made it mean what I wanted it to mean,—and what I didn't know, I didn't bother to understand.
- 3—I was reluctant to put forth the effort it cost to be good. The easy way was the attractive way.
- 4—I sought people who "lived" steps 1, 2, 3. Birds of a feather flocked together. It was no problem being cowardly with cowards, impure with the impure, negligent with neglecters. Weak-

ness of morals never feels rebuked among moral weaklings.

- 5—I avoided the one salutary check-up I needed—Confession (and a bad conscience can find a lot of excuses for not going to the sacraments).
- 6—I missed Mass and Communion—and, thus, lost Grace and contact with God.
- 7—I worked at justifying this whole process. To justify self, I had to condemn God; the next step was to deny Him and religion so that there would be nothing or no one to which I would be responsible.

I did not discover this pattern in one afternoon or evening. It represents a lot of arguments with priests and family and friends, a good many sour memories, too many serious sins, and a conscience that only lately, shucked off a hard crust of neglect. The points were all put together for me last year by a priest I met while finishing college. I wish they had been as obvious to me in my adolescence as they are today.

I would date the beginning of “loss” where Faith is concerned, at that point of life which found me missing Mass with regularity. As I go back to the first time I missed Sunday Mass, I see that some of the points I have set up in my pattern were evident at that time; each time I repeated this sin, I was deepening the pattern. From this habit, other carelessnesses grew, until I was swamped by a general disorder of life. What I had thought was a simple matter of omitting my Sunday worship, became a

wedge which widened in maturity to a complete refusal to serve God in anything.

My years in High School are merely an expanding aspect of the fundamental frame of losing Faith. A foolish free-and-easy attitude about what I owed God, developed into a looseness of morals that found me degrading sex, encouraging immorality and moving toward an animal fringe of existence. At the time, I told myself that I was entitled to some license and I swore that I was enjoying myself; today, I must be honest and admit that under all the cocky front, I was an unhappy person.

I won't go through the years of service or the time in which I finished College. Sin is monotonous in its repetitiveness. I did the same things against God throughout the whole period of unbelieving. The seven points were repeated; the seven points were solidified.

My life, then, revolved around and processed through this sevenfold pattern. Rejection, begun and given impetus in High School, ran amok in College and became a rampant thing during my stint in service. I touched all the points of failure except murder, treason and highway robbery; my monotonous list includes sacrilege, contempt for authority, bad confessions, impurities with myself and others, scandal and bad example . . . the whole devil's rack of refusals to follow God's law.

How did I manage to get some order out of such chaos? I would say a beginning was made by a service Chaplain. I had been trying to avoid this Chaplain ever since the day I had told him I was an Atheist. He had laughed good-naturedly, at the time

and asked me how I managed to be a Catholic and an Atheist, but I declined to discuss the point.

One day in the PX, I was standing at the counter drinking coffee. I never noticed the man beside me until he asked for a light. The voice rang a bell and I turned to look on the smile that had set me off, weeks ago. I pushed my book-matches over the counter and told him to keep them. My coffee was steaming hot but I gulped some of it and picked up my change.

“Have you decided to tell me how you manage?” The hard level eyes held me from walking away.

“Manage what?” I snarled.

The Chaplain looked mockingly surprised. “Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten. I wanted to know how you managed being a Catholic Atheist.” He was reminding me of that first day’s boast.

My cigarette was a mat of shredded tobacco under my grinding heel. I looked down at it and kicked it against the counter before I spoke. This crack I had been wanting to make since the first day he had asked that question. “I manage pretty easily,” I said casually. “A guy just follows a couple of rules. Rule one is, ‘Don’t think too much’ and rule two is, ‘Avoid Chaplains.’”

He shrugged his shoulders, “You’re soft, Corporal . . . very soft and I can see that’s why you say you don’t believe anymore. Believing in God needs a tough soul. When you believe, you have to give up a lot of cozy living *you* haven’t the courage to quit. You haven’t quit believing . . . you’ve quit living the cost of that belief! You prove to me that you are

living a better life outside the Catholic Church, and I'll admit your point."

I remember that my next few days were very uneven ones. I worked badly, ate poorly, slept fitfully, I kept telling myself that there was some reason for me to be outside the Catholic Church. Why, I wondered, couldn't I just say that She went Her way and I went mine? That thought helped me until I recalled the Chaplain's idea about not being able to live the cost of being a Catholic. That meant that I had quit the Church—the Church had not quit me.

Why? . . . Why? . . . Why had I quit the Church? The Chaplain said my reason had to be a proof of a better way of life than the one offered by the Church. I would have to show that I was right about life and the Church was wrong.

My answer to this suggestion was to curse the Chaplain and the Church. I still felt I was right, and if that made the Church wrong then she was wrong!

Proving the Church Wrong

Sometime, just for all around exercise, try to prove that the Catholic Church is wrong. My attempt to prove that little contention earned me a workout in all the departments of my life. The whole thing is best compared to walking through a field of tangle vines overgrown by burr patches. I was involved in a hundred angles of life when I tackled the proof of the "wrongness" of the Catholic Church.

First I tried to figure out, for myself, what it was I found wrong with the Church. I felt She must be

wrong about a lot of things. I had "batted" with plenty of the Catholic men, married, single, divorced, fat, tall and lean and they all had some gripe against the Church.

That word "gripe" didn't help my argument. The men I thought about, had been gripers and I realized that I had sought them with a purpose. We had been looking for sympathy in our fight with the Church and the "misery-boys" love company. I was burned to recall that most of the men I remembered had been fellows who lived as I did; no Mass, spotty morals, spiritual soft berthens and "gold bricks" on the Church score. The Chaplain would have told them that they, also, had quit. They were no help in setting up reasons for having a better way of life.

I rolled up my sleeves and decided to go this alone. I would prepare a list of the things that bothered me. I started with the one which the Chaplain had suggested once, the Mass. I didn't go to Mass because . . . how pitiful my reasons for not going! . . . I didn't go because I didn't like to go and Mass interfered with my Sunday mornings. I knew perfectly well that these reasons didn't make the Mass useless. They were personal preferences and had nothing to do with the point I was to prove . . . the Church was wrong. The only valid reason for not going to Mass would be to have a better way to worship God . . . and I had not found one! I had abandoned all worship!

There was no help in saying that I didn't understand the Mass or that it was meaningless in Latin. All our service Chapels had pamphlet racks that were filled with books that explained the Mass or the

Chaplain would teach me about it, if I asked. As far as the Latin was concerned, that was a limp excuse also; the Mass books were in English for those who wanted them.

The forcefulness of this argument against me did not dissuade me from pecking away at the Church. I shook off the attack and renewed my old way of life. At this period, I fixed my sights on justifying the way of life I was leading. I rationalized everything I did against my conscience and I blotted out the Church by going one step further—I'd prove that even God didn't exist. I kept saying for my own reassurance, "I don't believe in God, anymore!"

I did not know it, but I had reached the point of furthest removal from God, for me. In the strange way of Providence, I had settled on the one theme that was to trip me up and start me back to Church. Once out of service, I returned to College and the hope of attaining my degree.

I decided to do some extra reading on Religion and the proofs that God was non-existent. I needed some suggestions on a reading list and went to this young Psychology professor. He looked like a good bet for some aids to a skeptic's reading. He was a kind of cynic who continually debunked religious values and he was young and jaunty enough to be familiar with us. I determined to corner "The Philosopher"—that was what we called him—and sound him out.

One day, after class, I stayed to chat with him. The preliminaries done with, I asked, "What do you believe in?"

"I believe in myself," he said, in a wise guy way.

“Yeh, I know that,” I replied sarcastically, “but what about God?”

“God? . . . God? . . . he paused and hummed a little bit . . . “I’m not sure of God.”

I came alive. Maybe I was on the right track. “Do you think there is a God?”

“I hope not. . . . I hope not!” He clowned a bit about being pious. “If there’s a God, I’m a cooked goose.”

“What do you mean, you hope not?” I asked in irritation. “Don’t you know?”

He shook his head, sadly, “Who knows?”

I could have swung at him. “Can’t we prove that there is no God?”

“No,” he said, “we can’t, and that’s what worries me, sometimes.”

“But lots of people don’t believe in God . . . what about them? They must have some ideas.”

He came close to me and whispered confidentially, “I don’t think there are lots of people who don’t believe in God. To be honest with you, I don’t think there is one person who doesn’t believe in God.”

“Your loco!” I shot at him, “I know lots of them right on this campus.”

He ignored my bad manners and answered, cordially, “What they say they believe and what they mean by it, are two different things.” He was warming up to the idea. “I have come to the conclusion that when men say they don’t believe in God, they mean they don’t believe in the idea of God as religions teach Him. But they all believe in something greater than themselves and call it by all kinds of names,

Force, Destiny, Providence, or something else." He pointed to himself and said, "I like to call it, 'Fate.'"

"You're some help," I remarked disgustedly. "I thought I'd read somewhere that someone had proved God didn't exist."

"You can't prove God doesn't exist. No one can."

"Well, can anyone prove He does exist?" I asked quickly.

"I know only this—it's easier to prove that God—or something does exist and runs the world." He repeated the idea in another way. "None of us is able to be independent from birth to death. We depend, depend, depend, from the time we are born, on nature, people and some Power that keeps us going. Call it God, call it what you want, it's easier to prove there's something, rather than nothing."

Something Rather Than Nothing

I swore to myself. "I don't want to prove there's something. I want proof there's nothing."

"Why pick the hard one?" he asked. "You can't say the world come from nothing, because nothing would produce just that" . . . he held his thumb and forefinger up to make a zero . . . "nothing."

I had begun to think I had picked the wrong guy and wanted to get away. "The Philosopher" was out of my depth and interest, but he was not letting me stop him. "No matter how hard you might want the world to be a thing that 'just happened,' you can't avoid the world, itself, which is so big and complicated that it demands a brain behind it." He pointed

to a small knife that swung from his vest chain. "Look at it this way. The simplest machine like this has to have a maker. Now, make the machine more complicated and the brain of the maker has to be cleverer to allow for the complications. Is that right?"

"Yeah," I said, "that's right." I wasn't paying more than half my attention to him.

He waved his arms in a wide circle. "If you magnify that idea by the biggest machine we know of—the world—imagine the genius that must be behind the world!"

I cut him short as he started to go on. "What about the Catholic Church . . . where does that come in?"

"The Catholic Church? . . . I thought you were worried about whether there was a God?" He grinned at me and looked surprised.

"Well, now, I'm asking about the Catholic Church?"

"The Philosopher" shook his head and hunched his shoulders, as if to signify that he had given up on me. "I don't know anything about the Catholic Church—I thought you wanted to disprove God?" He pressed forward and said, quietly, "Do you see what I mean about the need for something great, a power or brain, behind the world?"

"Yeah! Yeah!" I said sharply, "I see."

"Look, friend," . . . he was tapping a finger on my chest . . . "if you got an argument with the Catholic Church, don't take it out on me. I talked about God because you asked me." He turned away and left me.

I realized that I had been shown more than a proof for the need of God. The stuff he had mentioned about no one being independent and the complicated

set-up of the world demanding something behind it . . . these things I agreed on.

I hadn't needed much convincing because I don't think I had ever really disbelieved God's existence. The proof that I didn't have trouble with God was the fact that I had been so anxious to talk about the Church. God had not been a problem or I would have been more deeply involved and interested in the conversation. I had been champing for "The Philosopher" to get to what was on MY mind. I had wanted the Church disproved. My friend had given me the clue in using the words "argument with the Catholic Church." I had never stopped BELIEVING in God. . . . I had been FIGHTING always with my Church!

That thought was the "crusher." I saw that I was back at the point of the argument I had with the Chaplain in service; I was back to the days of High School when I argued with my Mother; I was right back at the beginning—at the first argument I had with the Church over that Mass I missed when I was fourteen. My whole life had been a kind of battle with the Catholic Church and I WAS NOT WINNING IT! The Church was unmoved, undiminished by all my flailing at Her and Her disciplines and teachings. She taught the same truths and asked the same fulfillments as when I had been in the eighth grade. But I—I had had no peace, I had fretted. I had been upset deeply in my attempt to upset the Church.

I decided on one more try. I went to see the Chaplain of the Catholic Club on Campus. I went with a chip on my shoulder and came away with a cross in

its place. The Priest had put it to me squarely and took none of my intellectual guff. I remember he said something like this, in answer to my opening remarks: "I'm sorry, Son—I never argue with a fallen-away Catholic. Why?—Simply, because they are not qualified to argue reasonably. They have no reasons for falling-away—every one of their reasons is discovered to be an excuse for something they are doing wrong. Excuses are poor proof in an argument."

He was talking much as my service Chaplain had talked—but, this time I couldn't run away. I sat, clenching and unclenching my fists as he raked me from top to bottom. Once, I jumped up and tried to bolt the room but he pushed me back into my seat.

"Take it!" he said, levelly, "take it, for a change. You've been handing it out to the Church for years. Take a little, in return."

And I took it, but good. My flush would have stopped traffic. Under my resentment was the nagging thought that he was too right to be denied. The prod went deep to the spark of Faith that yet remained to me. I was admitting grudgingly that Father had my number.

I can't recall all he said at that initial interview but the substance of it was this. No Catholic who leaves his religion is ever convinced that he is right . . . as much as, he is sure the Church is wrong. In a telling way, the Priest showed me that few Catholics who fall away drop out of the Church on some intellectual or doctrinal problem . . . 99% "slip-out" on a moral conflict. They are not bothered by what they

must believe, but they are bothered by the standard they must live up to.

He sounded off about my attitude as being so typical of the lax Catholic who tries to justify his bad life. I put this idea of justification as the last point in my pattern, but it was the number one point with the Chaplain. He was clever in his insights as he analyzed all the petty excuses and feeble gripes that I had been guilty of, in trying to justify my sins. I got the impression that these weak reasons for running out on God must be pretty common things in many of the lives he dealt with. He had even the puniest of my alibis down pat and I was forced to smile as he mimicked my manner of expressing them.

Faith Comes By Hearing

The Cross, I mentioned as receiving in the Priest's Office, was the promise I gave to return once a week for a set of talks. I groaned at the time I gave the promise but groaned just as much when my course ended. For the first time I was seeing my Faith in all its glory and beauty. I could handle it and explain it to others. I learned its enduring qualities, its Divine foundation, its matchless assistance, to gain God.

The Priest and I took my problems first, and, then, went on to a study of Catholicism. With each problem we delayed to see where I had gone wrong and from the errors I discovered in myself, I drew up the seven points to disbelief. The Chaplain set the outline for the steps and let me fill them in.

The first problem, he claimed, was my confusion

on the matter of why I was made. He pounded at that idea of getting purpose in life—God's purpose. He said that all I had told him about my missing Mass and the breaking of the Commandments came from vagueness about MY PURPOSE in being in the world.

I had never fully grasped the simple words of the catechism: "God made me to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him. . . ." If I had comprehended that idea in childhood, I would not have begun a career of serving self and selfish companions. From that first serious refusal to worship God to the last grave rejection of Him, I had acted as if I had a right to do as I pleased. God's commands and God's counsels had not been half as important as my body's demands and my body's persuasions. In each sin, my debt to God, the due honor I *owed* Him, was wiped out and I chose to do what I felt I owed myself.

As I go over every incident of rejection that I committed against God, I am aware that in each I failed to know my purpose of Service to God. I saw things as *owed* to me; Sunday morning sleeps, meat on Friday, impurities, obscenities—these were deliberate temporary purposes I chose for myself against God's ultimate purpose. Had I known and grasped deeply that God made me for the sole purpose of gaining Heaven, I would have served the things that led me there, rather than the things of "self" that led me away.

All the drifters in the world begin the long way away by first losing purpose. Perhaps, theirs is not so much a losing of an eternal goal as it is never

fixing on it, firmly and resolutely. Selfishness takes over and, soon, they are attracted too dearly to their own ends to bother clarifying God's end. With God's main purpose obliterated, the soul falls prey to temptation.

Lose sight, as I did, of God wanting you for Himself, and you soon lose touch with His virtues and Commandments.

Any of you who are reading this, who have drifted from the Church, test this first point against your life story. Were you clear in your purpose of WHY God made you, when you started drifting away? Are you set in God's purpose, now? For what do you live? Money? Impurity? Reputation? Advancement? Did God make you to fly from Him in an invalid marriage, in the practice of Birth Control, in the tempest of Divorce? Or did God's purpose make you to know and love and serve? The check-up is fairly easy—if you are arguing with the Church about any of these things, then know that you are serving yourself; the Church never stops serving God, and, therefore, has no argument.

My course of instructions continued for the rest of the term. As I learned my religion, I began to see how knowledge of my Faith would have saved me many mistakes in my early days. It is this idea that led to formulating the second point of my pattern for falling-away from Faith. Take the Mass, for example. If I had understood, at any time, firmly and clearly, that Christ is really and truly present under the appearance of bread and wine in the Mass, I would never have omitted it. To penetrate, a little bit, the

staggering mystery of the Real Presence on our altars is enough to keep a man studying and learning for a lifetime the Mass of Christ.

Take the Sacrament of Penance. I made a bad Confession when I was young because I thought the Priest would take my sins as a personal insult. I did not understand that Christ had left the Power to forgive sins as a sign of His mercy. The Priest was interested in my sins only that he might forgive them by God's power. He was not, and no Priest ever is, waiting to abuse the sinner—he is waiting to take away the sin. I, and hundreds like me, drag in the human element and we start thinking for the Priest. We would do better to work up concern for our sins, instead of concern over what the Priest may think or say. Usually, the Priest will say no more than Christ would say: "Go in peace . . . sin no more."

I find as I keep refreshing myself about my religion that conflict after conflict is minimized. Problems on fast and abstinence, the Legion of Decency, forbidden books, marriage laws—all fit smoothly into a pattern of authority and legislation. When I saw that Christ had Divinely commissioned a Church to teach and divinely guaranteed Her in Truth, I had no trouble accepting what that Church taught.

The Church of God or I?

It was not easy buckling under to this point of authority. I guess I fought this out with the Club Chaplain for three straight instructions. I tried every loophole I knew to escape the Church and Her "hold"

on my life. At last, the Chaplain pinned me with this thought. Take the Church as God's authority in your life or take yourself! Which do you want?

He showed me that once you agree there is a God and that Christ was God, you come to a stymie if you don't accept the Church. Christ came to *GIVE* Himself and His truth. How get the gift and where get the giver, if He has not remained *IN* something or some place? The Bible was not the something, because the Bible contained dead words without a living voice to explain them—a Living Voice and an Official Voice. If I said I could interpret the Bible, I made myself the Living Voice! And by the same token everyone else could become a Living Voice! What a confused roar that would set up in the realm of truth. The dilemma left me with the choice of an official, divinely constituted Authority. Reason told me that I had to choose the Church or my old spiral of chaos again. Christ made my choice of the Church very definite, by leaving me the thought: "On this rock (Peter) I will build My Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." If Christ had built it, who was I to begin living a Church of my own making?

The deeper understanding of my Religion led me to a deeper understanding of myself and the formulating of the third point. I saw that I was a "soft" person, as one Priest in Service had pointed out. Most of us tend to be "soft" when it comes to God's obligations. Our human nature is not made for twenty-four hour tours on the good ship "Heroic." We can make a grand gesture and swagger as we hurl a defy to the world, but, oh! when we must drag out a life-

time being faithful to that grandness! That's a different story!

My weakness was the common, general one of self-indulgence. It flowed from a lack of purpose; a failure to see why I should be good and decent and pure. Once underway, self-indulgence became a law unto itself. This vice "took over." Where, at first, I confusedly missed Mass or committed an impure act, the resulting sloth and self-gratification growing from these things, demanded satisfaction in themselves.

This is the story of the making of bad habit. The first time you sin you don't have a habit of sin . . . you don't have a facility for evil. The second and third times, you have a habit a-growing, and the facility encouraged. The bane of this situation is that our natural tendency to take the "easy way" is caught up with, by this development of facility in evil. The combination is a deadly demand on our natures. The strain of resisting becomes finally too great for most of us, if we neglected God's grace and assistance.

The obverse side of this "taking the easy way" is very unpleasant to consider. It shows a soul who cannot pay the "cost" of being good and faithful. Such a weakling (and I was this all the way) cannot give up cheap companionship to love God, tawdry sex experiences to achieve a healthy purity, or childish self-will to observe Christ's command—"Follow Me!"

When I think of what I got, in trade for God, I am sickened with myself. And, to think that I *FOUGHT* to make these gimcrack values take the place of God in my life! I go over, sadly, each Mass I missed and match its greatness against the Sunday

sleep I had, the crap game or card game I played, the drinking bout I indulged in. I look at my blushing record of girls I led into sin, or men I coaxed to indecency and I have nothing to brag about here but God's favorite virtue dragged through the mud.

Tied in with this notion of the "easy way" is the fourth point. As I chatted in my course of instructions, I remarked how often a name or names were linked to my failures. I cannot blame companions for what I did. I think I should take the blame for the complete job of Faithlessness. But, may I offer a caution on companionship. When you pick 'em, make 'em good! Make your friends among people who are a bit beyond your grade in the spiritual order. This will keep you stepping to keep up with the parade. You will, also, see yourself to be out of step quickly enough, if you line up with good marchers.

I go over my choice of companions and I realize that I sought those who would rebuke me least. Birds of a feather do flock together, believe me. If you want a fast glance at what you are, list your ten closest friends and constant companions. What is their reputation? Good? Bad? Indifferent? Check off the qualifications and there YOU are.

The factor of companionship that is most potent is the natural response in all of us to imitate our friends. This works both ways—choose bad companions and you'll mimic their hindering ways; select good companions and you have set up a standard of excellence that will serve you well.

My failure to make the wise choice resulted in some

of these black moments I have hinted at in this story. If I had it to do again, there would be no High School “gang” with a set of morals approximating the moronic; there would be no scoffing teacher for a hero; there would be no drift to the loose-tongued, grouchy, griping type of service man who always had an excuse for his delinquency. High School and Service and College present a full complement of “good eggs” with high standards—today, I’d choose these for companionship. Today, I seek them out as I settle down to begin my new life.

Faith Found Again

My instructions were half completed when the Priest suggested I go to the Sacraments. When I hesitated about Confession, he laughed and said: “Come on! You’ve been ducking it long enough.” And, he was absolutely correct. I made the thought the fifth point in my pattern of losing Faith. It was so true; I had persisted in sin because I couldn’t bring myself to go to Confession.

Funny, once you commit a serious sin and you suspect you’ll repeat it, you start avoiding Confession. In a sort of terrible way, a fellow “stacks up” his sins and waits to unload them all at once. This is really an abuse of Confession, but many of us don’t realize that. A more serious mistake is avoiding Confession because we know that it means having to promise to amend our lives. Here is where our “softness” affects us. We can’t pay the “cost” of the check-up, the giving-up of our sins. We delay in our indulgences

and vicious habits. Then, a crust covers our conscience and the need to go to Confession becomes less imperative.

Sometimes, a bad Confession plagues us and we dread to reveal this to a Priest. I had this problem from High School. It tortured me for years until I had become hardened against the whole religious set-up. In all cases, the neglect of Confession is the sure sign of a fallen-away—and, the sure sign of a person fighting a moral problem. Neglect is, also, a sign of a lack of desire to be better in God's way. There is nothing intellectual or reasonable about a Catholic rejecting the Sacrament of Penance. When he *knows* that Christ has left the Power of Pardon in the grant "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven"—and he avoids that Power, he must do some tall explaining to show why he prefers to remain in sin. Does he love his sin? Or does he dread the hardship of fighting to be sinless? If he loves his sin, he clutches a strange, repulsive love to his heart. If he dreads the fight to be sinless, he admits himself a coward. On either count, the Catholic who shies from Confession is a "gone-goose."

I got down on my knees in the Chaplain's office and poured out the burden of the years. What a relief when I stood up! If someone had lifted a whole world from my shoulders I could not have felt lighter. I was laughing nervously from the sensation of the great weight of sin being dumped. May I say, "Try Confession!" to the person who is reading this and has a backlog of sin. Your burden is not worth the refusal of the joy of relief.

Communion followed Confession and I was "Home." That first (a fit description for me in my new understanding) Communion was all light and glory. I couldn't believe that someone as rough, tough and nasty as I had been, could experience the glory that I did in receiving Christ in the Eucharist. Back in my pew, I tried to pray, but kept being distracted by the thought of what I had been missing all these years. What a fool I'd been to utter the words of all fools: "I don't believe in anything, anymore!"

As with Confession, the years seemed to fall away and I was feeling younger and freer than I had for a long time. The hard task of persevering in my "return" was before me but that Communion told me I could achieve perseverance in Christ. If there were steps to unbelief, then, there could be steps to renewed Faith. The pattern of loss could be turned into the pattern of gain.

I described some of this to Father and he agreed with me. What I neglected could be cared for, what I starved could be nourished. The pattern of loss could be the pattern of gain, if I filled up the failures.

I have been trying hard to do just that for the last year. Once in a while I stumble, sometimes I've fallen—but I don't remain down. Faith is too important, now, to be neglected. Even if only for the practical reason of Peace of mind and heart, I want a strong Faith. But, more than that, I cherish it as God's favor to me and His special care for me. In gratitude for Faith and for a second chance, I must work at rebuilding my belief.

The only sadness I have, is the thought of others

who live, now, as I once lived. I pray that they may meet the person, read the book, *lose* the argument, that will turn them back to God. I pray that their pattern of loss may become a pattern of gain; that Faith, lost may be found. God waits for them . . . perhaps, for you who read this booklet. . . . His grace can renew you, if you ask for it. Why wait, and lose the second chance He is encouraging you to take? Faith, lost . . . with God to guide you, can be found.

THE PAULIST FATHERS

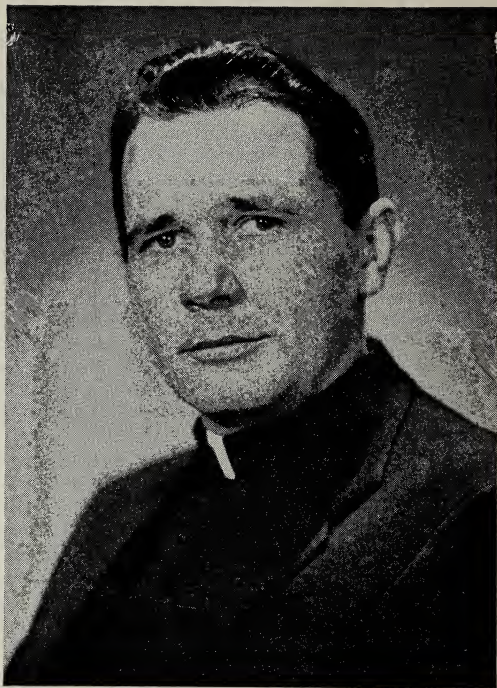
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Nearly a hundred years ago, five American priests—all converts to the Catholic Church—frequently discussed the importance of explaining the Catholic Faith to the people of America. Isaac Thomas Hecker soon became their inspiring leader. He had read widely, engaged in advancing the cause of the workingman, and had consulted with leading Americans regarding a satisfying philosophy of life. Finding this in the Catholic Church, he dedicated his life to the assistance of those searching for eternal truth. In 1858, after presenting his plans to Pope Pius IX, he received permission to form—with his four associates—a society of priests who would labor to win converts and preserve the faith of our Catholic people.

First Superior and indefatigable leader, Father Hecker initiated the work that gradually blossomed into the Paulist apostolate. He gave lectures to non-Catholics, wrote books to enlighten them, founded *The Catholic World*, and published Catholic books, pamphlets and leaflets for widespread distribution.

Later on, his followers expanded these works. Parochial missions for the spiritual rejuvenation of Catholics, dear to the heart of Father Hecker, are now given in every part of the United States, in Canada, and in South Africa. Lectures to non-Catholics were systematized by Father Walter Elliott and still attract large numbers, especially in the form of Dialogues. Father Elliott, along with Father Alexander Doyle, organized courses in mission methods for priests, which are continued to this day. They also established *The Missionary* magazine which is now known as *Information*.

Changing times bring new needs and new opportunities to further the Paulist apostolate. Newman Clubs at State Universities; Trailer Chapels for the country districts; Information Centers in our large cities; THE PAULIST PRESS, perhaps the largest Catholic press in the country—these are works closely identified with the Paulists. *Techniques for Convert-Makers* assists priests and seminarians to participate in this work. And *The Paulist News* acquaints friends with the activities of the Society. Paulists are located in twenty-three parishes or mission centers laboring to fulfill the religious and spiritual ideals of Father Hecker.



MEET THE AUTHOR

Father Finley of the Paulist Fathers received his B.A. from Seton Hall University and was ordained in 1947. He has served at St. Lawrence Church in Minneapolis, at the New York Paulist Information Center and is now on the New York Paulist Mission Band. The non-Catholic with a question to be answered will receive a prompt response if he addresses it to Father Finley, % The Paulist Press.