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THE CATHOLIC
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**LIGUORIAN PAMPHLETS
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LIGUORI, MISSOURI**

The Catholic Church has the answer to all the problems of life—including the problems that bother young people.

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TEEN-AGERS AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

By ERNEST F. MILLER, C.S.S.R.

The Catholic teen-ager is pretty lucky. Why? He is in possession of the Catholic religion. That may sound exceedingly arrogant. It is not meant to be so. What then does it mean? What does a teen-ager's being or not being a Catholic have to do with his being or not being lucky? The answer is in the following lines. May they be blessed by the touch of God.

When a man is playing poker with a crowd of card sharks who have been trimming him badly right from the start of the game, and all of a sudden, when the biggest pot of the whole evening is on the table, comes

up with a *full house* — three aces and two kings — he's in luck. If he plays his cards right, his losses will be recouped. His enemies will go home confounded.

So it is with teen-agers and the Catholic religion. Teen-agers also have sharks and sharpies of every description against them. They are pursued and hypnotized by singers who can hardly hold a note and yet who can lead them into a jungle of frenzied gyrations that go for dancing, almost as though they were aborigines or even animals. They are pulled this way and that by eccentric fellow teen-agers who wear odd and ugly clothes, talk an almost unintelligible language and give off the impression that they are so hard that an iron rail is putty in comparison, and who sometimes are definitely as hard as they make themselves to be.

They have parents to be obeyed, teachers to be listened to, policemen to be avoided, priests to be honored, brothers and sisters to be placated. Above all, they have themselves to contend with, with the uncounted little devils who have suddenly taken up residence in their bodies and their minds, tempting and tormenting them with thoughts and feelings of independence and sensuality and superiority and disgust, until they do not know what way to turn.

It looks as though the cards are stacked against them in the game of life that they must play between the ages of twelve and twenty. It is possible for them to lose more than one hand against such formidable opposition. Unfortunately some teen-agers lose all their hands. A *full house* never comes their way to recoup their losses.

But to Catholic boys and girls there is dealt a hand by God that is superior to all other hands, a hand that is unbeatable, a hand that is easily the equivalent not only of a *full house* but even of a *royal flush*. *This hand is the Catholic Church*. No teen-ager who is true to his Catholic religion need fear that he will end up *broke* when the game of life is over.

Specifically, how does the Catholic Church help teen-agers?

There are areas of fun and recreation that boys and girls like to frequent — movies, dances, parties, books, companions of the same and of the opposite sex. Some of these areas are healthy; others are filled with danger and spiritual contamination.

Movies that are immoral in part are like food that is partially spoiled. One dose of the poison that is distilled by the partially bad movie may not destroy the faith of the teen-ager who partakes of it. Repeated doses may. Constant dripping wears away the stone. A sufficient number of tainted motion pictures can destroy the life of the soul. So it is with books.

At this point the Church, following the divine guidance promised her and relying on the two thousand years of experience that she has in dealing with problems of conscience, points out to young people the kind of books and movies that are harmful. She lays down principles as to what is right and wrong, what is good and bad. Not only that. She passes moral judgments on particular books and movies as to whether they come

under the general principle determining what is good and what is bad.

She puts no physical pressure on teenagers to follow her judgments. She has no military divisions or regiments. Her work is a service of charity, not a force like the police department or the army. It is a service only in the moral order. It has nothing to do with censorship or book-burning or boycotting. It is merely a label that is put on a bottle, like the POISON label that is put on the bottle of rat-killer. If anybody wants to drink rat-killer in spite of the label on the bottle, that is his business. If a teen-ager wants to go to movies and to read books that are adjudged immoral in whole or in part by sensible and intelligent people, acting on the advice and with the help of the Church, that also is his own business. But he will have only him-

self to blame if he falls into serious sin and finally loses his soul.

Many teen-agers do not have this service, this help. Or rather, they have it, but they have not been educated to its usefulness and its necessity. They have been told that anything, no matter what it is, that curtails their freedom is bad. The word POISON should not be put on the rat-killer bottle. Such signs curtail freedom. The letters "B" and "C" should not be put on movies. They curtail freedom. Teen-agers are to find out what books and movies are good and bad by the method of trial and error.

They are bound to be hurt by such a system.

As long as one is in one's teens, one is hardly equipped to know and to pass judgment on the finer points

of morality. Help must be had from older and wiser heads, but older and wiser heads that are sufficiently in touch with God to be able to speak with some assurance and certainty on the morality of a particular situation.

Only the Catholic Church has been given the direct commission by almighty God to stand guard over the deposit of morality He gave the world when He made it. Our Lord said to the Church: "Go forth and teach all nations whatsoever I have commanded you." "He who hears you hears Me; he who despises you despises Me." "Feed My lambs; feed My sheep." What our Lord meant by these words was this: "Go out and tell teen-agers about bad shows and bad parties and bad books and bad dances. Talk to them straight from the shoulder. Tell them the truth about what is good and what is bad

in all these things. And I promise to guide you in your guidance of them.”

As it is with books and movies, so it is with parties and dancing and the social games that are played and enjoyed among teen-age boys and girls when they are out for an evening of fun. Only teen-agers know why they prefer certain dances and games that to their elders seem to make no sense. But that is their privilege and their business. They have a right to free choice just as do those who are long out of their teens. Nor can their taste always be condemned. Their preferences need not correspond to the preferences of the middle-aged and the old.

But some dances and games can be expressions of that which is evil, or they can cause evil in the minds and the bodies of those who participate in them. They can arouse the

passions. They can stir up thoughts and desires that are forbidden. In short, they can take away rather than increase the enjoyment of the fuller and the richer life, which should be one of the effects of decent and healthy recreation. Such dances are the sensual, the almost ritualistic dances that have come directly out of the forests and the jungle hinterlands of the world, and are the product of people who are still primitives and have not as yet been civilized or Christianized.

Teen-agers may be led into this sort of recreation by their youthful exuberance, by the force of their budding powers and passions and by the evil example of immoral older people who are willing to promote anything that will turn over a quick "buck," even though it destroys all that is good and fresh in the process.

They can also be led astray by some of their own contemporaries who have no religion or standards of right and wrong and who live by their senses and their instincts just as do the natives from whom the tribal dances come. There is a sufficiently large numbers of teen-agers of this stamp in America. May God have mercy upon their parents!

But here again the Catholic Church is the strong defense for the Catholic teen-ager. Once more she runs up the flag of warning. She tells her young folks to guard against that form of recreation that is primarily sensual in nature and in purpose. She tells them that anything, whether a game or a dance or a party, that stirs up passion unnecessarily outside of marriage can be a mortal sin. She insists that anything that is a source of temptation to another, whether

that other be an onlooker or an actual participant, can be a serious sin. She draws clear lines between the right and the wrong so that there will be no doubt in the mind of any young person as to what is allowed and what is forbidden. In so doing, she is offering invaluable aid to all teenagers who listen to her voice.

These are but a few samples of the help that the Church gives her children in the many problems that face them in the moral order. There are innumerable more. But the greatest gift of all that she offers them is the gift of heaven. She has it in her power to lift them over the top of a torn and troubled world into the very arms of God. It is her primary mission upon this earth — to save souls, to bring people to the happiness of heaven.

Some teen-agers think that the winning of heaven is a passive business rather than an active one. It is their contention (their actions would suggest as much) that all one has to do in order to go to heaven is to behave like a stick on the current of a stream. They need but float through life, concerning themselves only with worldly things, and they will someday see the face of God. This is not true. *Things have to be done.* One doesn't *back* into heaven. One enters the front door by the accomplishment of good works out of love for God, or one doesn't enter at all.

The Catholic Church tells teen-agers (as well as others) what these good works are, how they can be practiced, what abuses must be avoided. Without the Church it would be very difficult to know what

to do and how to do it in order to go to heaven. Without the Church one cannot be certain even when one should go to church, and what should be done there when one finally arrives. It takes *the* Church to give life and meaning to *a* church. That is exactly what the Catholic Church does. It makes *a* church a road that leads to heaven.

A few examples show the meaning of this statement.

The Catholic Church has the Mass, which is the mysterious and unbloody sacrifice of our Lord's holy body blood for the sins of the world. That the Mass is the unbloody continuation of Mt. Calvary has been the teaching of the Catholic Church from the days of the apostles. The Catholic Church has confession which is the infallible means of having *all*

sins taken away through the medium of the sorrow and purpose of amendment on the part of the penitent, and the absolution of the priest. That confession can take away sin is clearly proved from the Bible and has been held by the Catholic Church from the days even before the Bible was completely finished. The Catholic Church has Holy Communion which is our Lord hiding under the appearance of bread and wine so that He can enter the bodies of men and be a part of their very person. Holy Communion has been a part of the heart of the Catholic religion for nineteen hundred years.

The Catholic Church has five other sacraments that enable people to go to heaven besides confession and Holy Communion. She has many kinds of prayers. She promotes numerous devotions. She furnishes ex-

perts for the dispensing of advice in matters of conscience. She is in close contact with the angels and the saints and enlists their help when necessary.

Any teen-ager who uses these means faithfully is bound to go to heaven. The Catholic Church will see to it that he goes to heaven. He cannot miss. An he will have a peaceful and happy life on earth besides. The Catholic Church has the answer to all the problems that can arise in the course of life. This does not exclude the problems that bother the young. She can solve the problems both of time and of eternity. Not a billion dollars could buy what the Catholic Church has to offer.

It is too bad that so many teen-agers do not take their holy religion seriously. They take it for granted, something that they were born with,

something that they intend to die with. Meanwhile they need not worry too much about it except in regard to the things that they have to do — Mass on Sunday, no meat on Friday, and so forth.

On occasion they are even ashamed of their religion.

If they are in a group of people in which some of the people are making fun of the practices of the Church and of the priests and the sisters, they remain silent; or worse still, they join in the criticism lest they be laughed at. On Friday when they are at the house of a non-Catholic and meat is served, they eat the meat, again because they are afraid that if they proclaim their Catholicity so openly by their refusal to eat the meat, they will be made fun of. People will look at them as though they were not quite normal. Some non-

Catholics consider Catholics a bit abnormal. Some Catholic teen-agers are afraid of this judgment. And so they hide their faith. They are ashamed of it.

This is a far cry from the teen-agers of the early days of the Church who gave up their lives rather than deny their holy religion. It is certainly different from the teen-agers who are members of the Jehovah Witnesses and of the Salvation Army.

The Jehovah Witness boys and girls stand on street corners and attempt to interest passersby in their literature even though they know that most passersby look upon the Jehovah Witness religion as a most fantastic conglomeration of odd beliefs. Salvation Army girls will dress up in a uniform and play a drum or a trumpet on a street corner in order "to save" the poor tramps and wan-

derers who might be attracted by the band to stay a moment afterward and listen to a sermon. It must be embarrassing to do things like this. But the young folks swallow their embarrassment and persevere in their effort to convert the world to their way of thinking.

Catholic teen-agers have so much more to offer. They have the religion that was founded by Jesus Christ, that was followed by martyrs and confessors, by princes and paupers, by the unlearned and the learned from the days of our Lord to the present day. They have a religion that is founded on tremendous miracles, on great sanctity, on an acceptance by people of every country of the world. They have a religion that has not changed in its essential doctrines from the day when these

doctrines were given to the world by God Himself.

Why then should they be ashamed?

On the contrary they should try to the very best of their ability to promote it amongst those who do not have it. They can do this by actually teaching it when the opportunity arises. When a discussion comes up on a doctrine or practice of the Church and nobody seems to have the right answer, the teen-ager should step forward with the right answer. He or she cannot do this unless the Catholic religion is studied seriously.

And teen-agers can spread the Catholic religion by good example.

There can be little doubt but that non-Catholic people know the teen-agers of a neighborhood who are Catholic and those who are not, even

though they may not know the teen-agers personally at all. And subconsciously if not consciously they watch the Catholic young people to see whether or not they live up to the high ideals that are preached by the Catholic Church.

If Catholic teen-agers use profane and foul language; if they are immoral in their actions; if they have little regard for people's property; if they roam about in packs of hoodlums and small-time toughs, they prevent converts from coming into the Church. The Church is judged by their conduct, not by the doctrines that are proclaimed by the Church. Teen-agers are the representatives of the Church. By their bad example they can do great damage to the Church's cause. By their good example they can bring many new members into the Church without so much

as preaching a single sermon or saying a single word. The example of no class of people is stronger in the effect it has on others than the example, good or bad, of the boys and the girls in their teens.

The years of the teens may in many senses be hard. They can be so easily misunderstood. They can be filled with new temptations, with strange feelings of rebellion. At the same time the years of the teens can be very happy and can effect great good. They will be happy and they will effect great good if they are made to rest on the firm foundation of the Catholic Church.

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