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PROTESTANTS
CAN
TEACH
CATHOLICS**

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Can Teach Catholics**

by

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MANY Catholics assume they have nothing to learn from their Protestant neighbors. The Catholic Church, they say, possesses the full revelation of Christ. Its doctrine is complete—perfect. What can Protestants possibly teach Catholics?

The answer is: Plenty. Not in matters of faith and morals, certainly. But in such fields as organization, missionary techniques, lay participation, radio and TV “know-how,” and many other areas.

The Reformation resulted in a loss to the Church of much more than millions of souls. The Church also lost generation after generation of good people with their musical and artistic genius, their ideas, their ingenuity, their zeal. It is impossible to estimate how much richer Catholic life would be today if their talents were a contributing factor.

Protestant Customs

Some Catholics have an idea that any practice now associated with Protestant worship is somehow heretical and "un-Catholic." Congregational singing, for example, or the use of the commonly spoken language in church services is regarded as strictly Protestant, to be shunned by Catholics like the plague.

But these and practically all other Protestant customs were once honored practices in the Catholic Church. There was a time when the entire congregation participated in singing the high Mass in the language they spoke everyday—Latin. Latin was adopted as the liturgical language of the Western Church not because it was mysterious or unknown to the people, but precisely because it was the language they understood.

Recent developments in the Church point to a rediscovery or re-emphasis on practices which for decades, even centuries, have been associated more closely with Protestant churches and sects. Twenty years ago the novelty of lay missionaries in Africa and the Orient was unknown, and the question of vernacular in the liturgy was seldom mentioned in Catholic circles.

There are a number of practices of non-Catholic Christians it would benefit Catholics to investigate. Among them are their manner of church support, their use of the vernacular

and congregational singing, their charitable friendliness, their wholesome respect for temperance in drinking liquor, the extent of lay participation in the operations of their church affairs, and their dedication to reading the Word of God.

Church Support

To begin with, the Catholic laity has much to learn from their Protestant brethren about church support. Parishioners with the oddest notions about church giving often are the very ones who criticize Catholic pastors for undignified, annoying and even illegal methods of fund raising.

They dislike bingo, raffles and carnivals, but consider fifty cents or a dollar a week to be an eminently generous contribution toward the support of the pastor and his assistants, upkeep of church and school, the Sisters and lay teachers, the janitor, housekeeper, organist, the diocesan assessment—to say nothing of new construction.

Members of the smaller Protestant sects put most Catholics to shame when it comes to supporting their churches. The 275,000 Seventh-day Adventists, for example, contribute an average of \$173 per year per member. They give another \$32 to foreign missions.

The records of other sects are equally im-

pressive: Free and Wesleyan Methodists, Church of the Nazarene, Church of God (Anderson, Ind.), Mission Covenant.

Would anyone argue that the average Catholic family approaches this kind of generosity with the Church? And the Protestant sects with the best records also find their chief support from the lower and middle classes.

Many Protestant denominations are launching tithing campaigns with outstanding success. The Biblical tithe called for one-tenth of the annual increase, but some churches have adapted this practice to modern conditions.

In view of the heavy tax obligations of most wage earners, these churches suggest that the tithe be computed on the basis of take-home pay after federal and state income taxes have been deducted. They allow a further consideration. Since secular and nonparochial agencies have taken over many of the charities and services of the local congregations (operations the church-goer is expected to support as a member of the community), he may allocate half his tithe to such causes, with the other half to his parish church.

In practice, then, the tither may give about four per cent of his income to his parish and the other four per cent to such organizations as the Community Chest, Red Cross, CARE, health agencies, colleges and universities, hospitals, and to missionary work.

Those who wish to start tithing slowly are encouraged to begin with two or three per cent. Most of those who begin with a smaller sum find they do not miss the money and end up as full tithers.

The tithe has two important effects. It provides the church with ample funds and allows the pastor to discontinue objectionable fund raising practices and second collections. It also works a change in the tither himself, who invariably develops a greater loyalty and interest in his religion and parish.

He finds himself drawn to join parish societies. He takes a more active interest in the parochial school. He learns, incidentally, to budget his income.

Many sects such as the Adventists and the Mormons insist on tithing as a membership requirement. Other denominations representing 35 million Protestants are promoting tithing as the preferred system of church giving: The Methodists, Southern and American Baptists, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, and others.

But tithing need not be considered a Protestant monopoly. The Jews and early Christians believed tithing to be the normal and just method of supporting religion. Some 20th century Catholics tithe and many others will find tithing as satisfying and rewarding as it was to their spiritual ancestors.

Vernacular in Church Services

One of the first moves made by the 16th century Protestant Reformers was conducting church services in the language of the people. Protestantism has used the vernacular ever since.

The Catholic Church reacted against novelty in religion and froze the liturgical language of the Western Church. But in recent decades, the movement within the Church for wider use of the vernacular has been growing.

Critics point to the difficulties encountered by many Protestant churches in getting members to attend Sunday services even though such services are held in the mother tongue.

But how long would Protestantism have survived had it adopted Sanskrit or Greek as its liturgical language? If Protestants shy away from regular church attendance, it is in spite of the vernacular and not because of it.

The disadvantages of a worship service in an unknown tongue are obvious. At Sunday Mass, only a small minority of the more intellectual parishioners attempt to follow the English translation in their missals. The rest are praying the rosary, day dreaming, pursuing private devotions, looking around, or napping.

When the early Church abandoned Greek for Latin, it was because Latin was the language the people understood. Had not the

Reformers pounced on the vernacular as a selling point, no doubt there would have been a natural switch to the various vernaculars when Latin ceased to be the *lingua franca* of Europe.

The need for direct communication between priest and people is known to Church authorities. Just a few years ago the sacraments of baptism, matrimony and extreme unction, together with 25 of the more common blessings, were authorized in the vernacular. Other concessions have been granted when requested by the bishops of other countries.

The Church evidently intends to introduce more vernacular gradually. Many liturgists believe portions of the Mass will be authorized in English within the next decade or two.

Congregational Singing

Along these same lines, Catholics can learn much from the Protestant custom of congregational singing. The spectacle of mute congregations would have amazed the early Christians who were accustomed to raise their voices in songs of praise.

Today in most Catholic parishes a trained choir, adult or children's, has established a monopoly in the music department while the worshipers sit in silence.

Part of the trouble lies in the relative scarcity of good Catholic hymns. Many Catholic

standbys are soupy, sentimental affairs set to ecclesiastical tin pan alley tunes. It tries a grown man's faith to sing them in front of his children.

Some organists and choir directors hesitate to draw on the store of classic Protestant hymns even though many are entirely free of doctrinal error and are musically superior to many Catholic compositions. Thus Protestant churches enjoy Palestrina and Newman's "Lead Kindly Light," while Catholics limit Protestant-inspired hymns to a few Christmas carols.

To encourage congregational singing, ministers equip their pews with hymn books or song cards, even though many of the selections are known by heart. The organists try to follow the tempo of the congregation. Hymns are clearly indicated by number on a hymn board near the chancel. Finally, where congregational singing is most successful, a director leads the congregation.

Hymns usually are in English; in Catholic churches, few are. Catholics have sung "O Salutaris" since the second grade and many have not the faintest notion of what the words mean. This might be unavoidable in the Metropolitan Opera, but it certainly militates against intelligent and wholehearted participation in congregational singing.

Better Communications

A spirit of heart-warming friendliness is apparent at Protestant church gatherings. It is true that their churches usually are smaller than Catholic parishes in metropolitan areas, but this is not the sole explanation for the coldness and impersonality of so many Catholic parishes.

The story is told of an elderly gentleman who entered St. Patrick's church, genuflected and knelt in his pew. He had neglected, however, to remove his hat. An usher quietly stepped over and asked him to kindly remove his hat.

The man in the pew beamed, took off his hat, and shook the usher's hand. "You know," he confided, "I've been a member of this parish for four years and you're the first person who has ever spoken to me." Would the same hold true if the locale were switched from St. Patrick's to Trinity Methodist?

The nature of Catholic worship rules out conversation in church. But this is no reason newcomers should not be made to feel welcome to the parish, that converts should not be introduced to a circle of Catholic contemporaries, that the pastor should not shake hands with his parishioners in the vestibule before Mass.

It does not mean that sick calls are the only occasions priests may visit parishioners' homes.

Nor does it mean that church-goers must always rush home to the Sunday newspaper or TV instead of chatting for a few minutes with their fellow members of the Mystical Body.

Roman pagans shook their heads in wonderment and said, "Look at the Christians. See how they love one another." Neo-pagan Americans must often reflect, "Look at the Christians. See how they ignore one another."

Temperance and Alcohol

Many Catholics ridicule the temperance efforts of their Methodist and Baptist neighbors and consider total abstinence to be a strictly Protestant ideal. They scorn the misguided efforts of the sects to bring back national prohibition and reject the demand that all Christians take the pledge.

On the other hand, the average Catholic adopts a distressingly casual attitude toward one of the nation's most serious problems—alcohol. Perhaps this attitude is understandable. In parochial schools and Sunday sermons it is explained that taking a drink is not sinful. Beyond this Catholics receive precious little scientific and moral instruction about drink. It is no wonder, then, that Catholic young people enter adult life with little or no guidance in this important area.

A recent report of the Yale Center of Alcohol Studies reveals that Irish-Americans con-

stitute 25.6% of first admissions of "alcoholic psychotics" in New York state hospitals. Scandinavians are next with only 7.8% and Italians with 4.8%. By contrast, Jews comprised one-half of 1%.

May we not presume that most of the Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans are Catholics?

The same study discloses that 41% of the Protestants questioned were teetotalers compared to only 21% of the Catholics. Likewise, 27% of the Catholics interviewed were classified as regular drinkers (three or more times a week) compared to 13% of the Protestants.

This country now counts more than four million alcoholics, and the number seems to be increasing each year. Americans spend nine billion dollars annually for liquor—many times what they volunteer for churches and colleges.

It appears to be about time that Catholic young people and adults received some systematic instruction on problems of alcoholism, possible dangers to health, the high cost of liquor consumption, the threats to family life caused by excessive drinking, the morality of drinking and driving, the dangers to purity in drinking.

After all, sobriety is part of the virtue of temperance, and total abstinence is certainly an honored means to a greater end in Catholic asceticism. The Catholic layman who voluntarily gives up liquor in reparation for

sins of drunkenness should not be stamped as a bluenose.

Fortunately some Catholics are bringing to the attention of the laity the Church's balanced position on temperance, together with latest scientific information. Among them are Father John C. Ford, S.J., Father John Keough, longtime president of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union, and Father Ralph Pfau through Alcoholics Anonymous.

Role of the Laity

During the past decade or two, there is greater evidence of lay participation in Church operations. Protestantism, with its doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, has long utilized the layman as missionary, church elder and deacon, YMCA and YWCA directors, secretaries, and the like.

The trustee controversy in nineteenth century America lingers in the memory of older priests, still gun-shy when it comes to inviting lay co-operation in the management of the parish's temporal affairs.

But the pastor who refuses to consult the laymen in his parish finds that he is expected to be bookkeeper, purchasing agent, investment counselor, architect, fund raiser, public relations expert, educator, building supervisor, and skilled in a long list of other specialized occupations.

In his parish he may have specialists in many, perhaps most, of these fields. Trained to assume a role of passivity and afraid of clerical rebuff, these laymen hesitate to volunteer their advice and services.

In some quarters, however, the laity has assumed the role of participants in the work of the hierarchy as envisioned by a series of popes. There is the Christian Family Movement, essentially lay inspired; lay Catholic missionaries in home and foreign missions, an apostolate which formerly was confined to priests and religious exclusively; more extensive employment of laymen in writing for and editing Catholic newspapers and magazines.

The Bible

There is still another field where Catholics may well learn from their Protestant friends. That is in spending more time reading and studying the Bible. Simply because Luther and Calvin rejected the importance of tradition by elevating the Scriptures to the position of sole rule of faith does not mean that Catholics should write off the Bible as a Protestant text.

The Protestant who devoutly reads the Word of God for a few minutes each day is enriching his spiritual life by tapping the best possible source of inspiration. The same is true for Catholics.

Perhaps Catholic families that now pray the rosary together in the evening might read selected passages from the New and Old Testament to add variety to this devotion. The layman should know by now that the Church imparts indulgences for a daily fifteen minute, prayerful reading of the Bible.

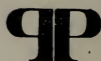
We need not imagine that Protestants do not also observe Catholic life and make such borrowings as seem desirable. This is a reciprocal trade. It is becoming more difficult each year to distinguish a Protestant chancel from a Catholic sanctuary.

Protestants are introducing Catholic altars, vestments, ecclesiastical furniture, prayers and rituals in an effort to bring beauty to the formerly austere Puritan worship and church building.

They now sponsor retreats which closely resemble Catholic retreats. Episcopalians and Lutherans join religious orders for men and women which were once branded as "papist."

The time is ripe to modify many attitudes adopted by the Church as reactions against the sixteenth century Reformation. The time has come to reclaim Catholic emphases which for centuries have been the distinguishing marks of those who embraced the new religions of the Reformation. They will re-enrich Catholic life.

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