


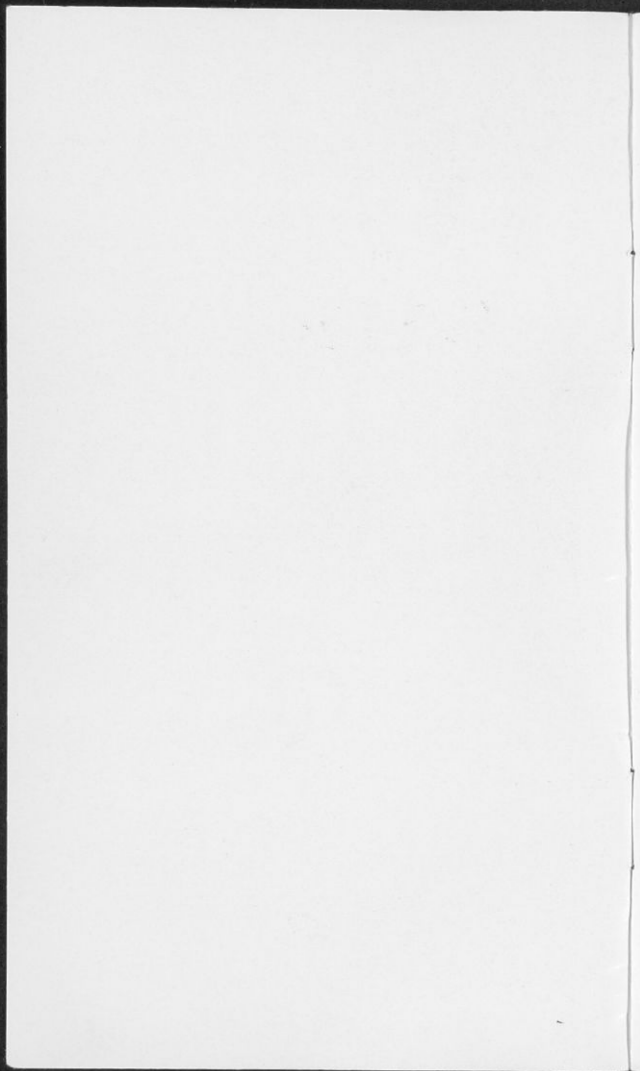
Bruni, Philip P.
Hello there...
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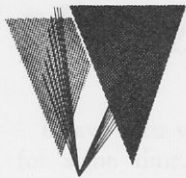


"Hello There . . . "



*A friendly message
briefly explaining some
Catholic teachings . . .*





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BY

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"Hello There . . .



I have been wanting to write this message for some time. Actually, it's been in the making for several months. And now, with a more-determined search for time and effort, I'm sending you the completed product. I assure you, here and now, that I'm writing you in all sincerity and friendliness.

The contents of this message, I hasten to add, are not strictly original. The material, in its essentials, is that taught by the Catholic Church for nearly twenty centuries. I was aided, in deciding just which parts of the Church's vast body of teachings to discuss with you, by opinions of friends, Catholic and non-Catholic, and fellow priests. This assistance, plus my own experience, leads me to pick just several of the many items I might examine with you. Consequently, we will be concerned here with things most commonly discussed by people all over the country.

It surprises me that so many are so often misled about us Catholics. You and I share many activities, belong to the same Clubs,

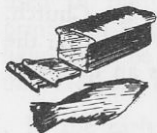
attend the same theatres, read the same publications and watch the same television programs. In fact, it's not infrequent here in our country to greet each other with a friendly 'hello' in coming to or going from our Churches. We Catholics never claimed to have any secrets. All this and yet you sometimes hear such weird and radical stories about us!

Before you put aside this letter with the remark: "He's trying to convert me", let me insist that my only intention in writing you is this: to acquaint you with some of the beliefs and practices of your Catholic friends . . . perhaps even your next-door neighbors. Your conscience and your sincerity will be your guides. No, your conversion is in greater hands than mine; I will leave your conversion to God.

Catholics do not, you know, object to public schools; we simply prefer our own religious or parochial schools. Nor do we believe that God will condemn those of other faiths. The pope, we sincerely believe, is the divinely-appointed head of the Church who rules within the framework of a divinely-constituted Church. And Catholic parents are not commanded to have large numbers of children. These are but a few of the things I want to write you about in this message.

Fish on Friday

Sometime ago, I was asked the question:



“Why do Catholics have to eat fish on Friday?” We don’t have to eat fish on Friday! We do though, abstain from eating meat on Friday. Replacing meat with fish is a custom started in the early days of the Church. Abstinence from meat on Fridays is practiced out of reverence for Jesus Christ, who died on Friday (Good Friday).

In connection with fish on Friday, you might have heard the phrases ‘day of fast’ and ‘day of abstinence’. I’ll clarify these. Days of abstinence are simply days when we refrain from eating meat. Days of fast are days on which we are allowed but one full meal and two smaller ones. Instances of fast and abstinence are found in both the Old Testament and New Testament.

The Mass

Volumes have been written about the Mass. Let me tell you, briefly, what the Mass is and then I’ll explain why it is celebrated in the Latin language.

The Mass (name used for the ceremony of the Euchar-



istic Sacrifice) is the renewal of Christ's sacrifice on the cross through His minister, the priest. In other words, the Mass, the most sublime act of worship in the Church, is the same sacrifice as that of Christ on the cross; now, though, it becomes an unbloody sacrifice of joy.

Christ Himself instituted the Sacrifice of the Mass on the eve of the Last Supper. We read, in Saint Matthew's gospel: "And while they were at supper, Jesus took bread, and blessed and broke, and gave it to his disciples, and said, *"Take and eat; this is my body."* And taking a cup, he gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, *"All of you drink of this; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is being shed for many unto the forgiveness of sins."* (26:26-28).

The order to repeat this unique Sacrifice is mentioned specifically by Saint Luke. Following the words of consecration, Christ said to His Aposles: *"Do this in remembrance of me."* (Luke, 22:19). And so it is that the Mass, the Holy Sacrifice, is re-enacted every moment of every day in Catholic Churches all over the world.

You, yourself, may have asked the common question: "Why doesn't the priest use a language that people can understand?" I hasten to add that the Latin language

happens to be that used in the Western world; other languages are utilized in other parts of the world. Too, any and all prayers used in the Mass and other services are printed in English . . . or whatever language happens to be in use in a particular area, so that everyone can follow the prayers.

In the early days of the Roman Church, Greek was replaced by Latin as the official language because it was the common language of the day. And now it is still in use, having been used for more than a thousand years. You'll admit that the use of only one language strengthens the unity of the Church. Now that English and other languages have replaced Latin to a great extent, a much larger use of English in the administration of the various services is permitted.

The Blessed Virgin and the Saints



Catholics don't worship, as some think, the Blessed Virgin; we don't consider the Blessed Virgin as a goddess of some kind. Worship or adoration, our beliefs state, is due only to God alone! This is seen in the teachings of the very first commandment: to worship any creature is seriously wrong. Mary, the Mother of Christ, is, as you and I,

a creature; so, to adore her would be an offense against the commandments of God.

It's not denied that the Blessed Virgin is highly respected. You may have heard us say prayers of intercession to her — the Rosary, consisting of a series of Hail Marys, is such a popular prayer; you might even have heard one of our many hymns dedicated to the Mother of Jesus. In honoring Mary in this way, we are simply imitating Almighty God. Her place in the divine plan commands respect and veneration in her honor.

When we admire someone very much, or when we want to become friendly with them, we seize every opportunity to make a good impression with his or her mother who, we're certain, has much influence with this potential friend. Why not honor, in a special way, the Queen of Saints, the person most closely associated with our divine Saviour in His redemptive work?


Intercession of the saints follows this same pattern. One writer recalls to us that it is "useful and salutary" to ask their prayers. We have abundant testimony from Scripture to show that the saints assist us by their prayers. Understand this: we do not dishonor God in the intercession of the saints. The Catholic Church teaches that God alone is the Giver of all gifts, that He alone is the

Source of all blessings; the Church further teaches that whatever happiness or glory or influence the saints possess, all comes from God.

One of the common prayers of the Catholic Church, the Apostles Creed, includes the belief: "I believe in the communion of saints". When Christians recite this beautiful prayer, they are adding their voice to that of Christ and the Apostles stating that there exists a spiritual communication or intercommunion between all the children of God: the saints in Heaven, the faithful upon earth and the suffering souls in Purgatory, a place of temporary punishment due to sin. Church teachings reveal that all members share in the same spiritual blessings, merits and prayers.

It might interest you to know that all statues, images and pictures of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as well as the Saints, serve only as incentives to more easily and sincerely gather our thoughts and emotions while praying; nothing more. The burning of candles on our altars and before our shrines is, as the burning of incense, an aromatic mixture, symbolical of Christian prayer. The offering of both, in a spirit of prayer and sacrifice, and rising to the throne of heaven, symbolizes faith and devotion.

Confession of Sins



I can recall spending many hours, in the seminary, studying the various aspects of the sacrament of Penance or, in more familiar terminology, Confession. I remember the code-words I used to help write a logical and complete explanation of the subject: 'pro' and 'con'; the first stood for the promise while the latter represented the word conferral of the power to forgive sins.

Our Lord promised the power of forgiveness of sins when He told the Apostles: "*Amen I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven.*" (Chapter 18 of St. Matthew). The later specific conferral of power to forgive sins is revealed in the words of Christ, spoken after His glorious Resurrection: "*As the Father has sent me, I also send you.*" When he had said this, he breathed upon them, and said to them, "*Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.*" (John, 20:21-23).

You may already know that everything one tells a priest in Confession remains secret as the priest is bound, even unto death, by what

we call the 'seal' of the Confessional. The physical structure of the Confessional, in the event you've visited a Catholic Church, might have caused you to ask: "What's this?" Ordinarily, it resembles a very small room. It is partitioned in such a way that the kneeling penitent, the one confessing the sins, is separated from the Confessor by a solid barrier with a small perforated screen for speaking purposes.

The actual confession of sins is performed thusly: after sufficient preparation, the penitent enters the confessional and confesses his sins. The priest, here a judge in God's name, may desire to offer some advice on how to be a better Christian, depending on the number and gravity of sins confessed. Some prayers or good works are then assigned; an act of sorrow, in the form of a prayer, is made by the sinner.

The priest says, following a short but beautiful prayer: "Therefore I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." In order to obtain forgiveness for sins, there must be sorrow and a desire to do better.

* * *

This is turning out to be quite a lengthy message, isn't it? I must admit that I am

rambling on and on; I hope you don't object. Besides, it's not often that we have a few moments to share.

* * *

The Pope



The Pope is not another God; nor is he a Church dictator. He is, we believe, the successor of Peter, the first Pope. The Catholic Church teaches that the Holy Father, the Pope, is the divinely-ordained head of the Church. It's as simple as that.

Can the Pope ever be wrong? Of course he can; in matters of simple choice like picking one team over another, etc. But when it comes to questions of faith and morals, we say that he is infallible. By infallibility of the Pope, we mean this: when, in his capacity as head of the universal Church, he defines some doctrine pertaining to faith or morals, he is protected from error. This does not mean that he cannot be erroneous in other matters.

I can presently think of two Scripture passages which refer to this conferral of forgiveness-power to Peter, the first Pope. Christ conferred the guardianship of revelation upon Peter and his successors when

He said: "*Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to thee, but my Father in heaven. And I say to thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*"

Following this important speech, Jesus added: "*And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*" (Chapter 16 of St. Matthew). The word for Peter in Aramaic means 'rock'; and, translated into our modern speech, Christ was saying that Peter was to be the rock, or solid foundation upon which He was to construct His Church.

This conferral of infallibility in teaching authority is again witnessed by Christ's speech to the Apostles: "*All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world.*" (Chapter 28 of St. Matthew). There are other Scripture passages and teachings of Tradition which help clarify the Church's teachings in this matter.

Priests and Nuns



Did you ever wonder why priests and nuns must study so long to prepare for their ministries? Simply because of the importance of their work. And have you wondered why they don't marry? I guess we could say in order that they may be more free to devote themselves to the work of God. Family ties and responsibilities do not bind them; they are able to devote all their time and talents to furthering the kingdom of God here on earth.

The following words of Saint Paul are often quoted on this topic: "But I say to the unmarried and the widows, it is good for them if they so continue, even as I . . . "He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. But he that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife; and he is divided." The garments of priests and nuns, incidently, are derived from earlier periods of the Church and are meant to convey virtues of poverty and humility.

One True Church

You probably have heard the claim that, in matters of religion, Catholics think they're

always right, and everyone else wrong. Or you may have heard it this way: "What makes those people think theirs is the one, true, Church?"

We've been accused many times of being intolerant. Some of this accusation, in a certain sense, is justified; some, false. Yes, we do believe that ours is the one, true Church and for this twofold reason:

1) Because the Catholic Church is the only Church founded by Jesus Christ (it's logical that Christ wouldn't found several Churches, isn't it?);

2) This Church is the only one to have received the divine commission, (along with the necessary powers) to "*Go and teach all nations*" in her divine Founder's name.

Yes, in these respects, we do claim that ours is the one, true Church. Were we to teach otherwise, we would be contradicting the evident teachings of Christ, the Apostles and the Scriptures. Rest assured that we don't mean to be independent or proud when we make this claim.

Let's investigate, briefly, the origin of the Catholic Church. Christ said to His Apostles: "*Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark, 16-15); and we read, in the 20th chapter of St. John:

"As the Father has sent me, I also send you". Allow me to offer one more pertinent quote on this topic: *"All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world"* (Matthew, 28: 18-20).

There are other related passages which help show that Jesus Christ really and actually founded a Church to which He gave power and authority to teach His truths to all nations. Furthermore, He promised His assistance *"unto the consummation of the world"*.

Marriage




Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ taught much about marriage. For clarity and convenience, I will classify the Church's teachings into two main divisions: 1) Marriage is a sacred union instituted by God; and 2) The partners, by pronouncing the life-long contract of matrimony, compliment each other in the procreation and education of children.

The Catholic Church teaches that the union attained in marriage is more than a natural union. Christ raised this contract to the dignity of a sacrament, thus sanctifying the union and offering graces needed for the fulfillment of the duties of this sublime state of life. Too, the Church does not allow divorce.

It's been nearly twenty centuries since Christ founded the Catholic Church. It has, in this period of time, undergone many difficult periods; it has stood up under numerous persecutions. In this long and sometimes tedious process, it has learned much. And as a result of this, the Church's teachings on marriage are based both on divine teaching and experience.

Everyone admits that religion is something very close to both partners, a subject presenting itself to husband and wife in thousands of different ways; it is definitely an area of life much more important than any other as far as husband and wife are concerned. And it automatically carries over into their social and cultural lives. What happens when they differ on such an important matter as religion? You'll readily admit that disagreement in such a vital topic as religion is not conducive to harmony and peace.

Scripture and Tradition



It's a firm belief of Catholics that their Church is the first and primary instrument by which Christ transmitted His teachings to His followers. It might startle you to know that this Church was preaching and teaching the sacred word of God for several years before a single word of the New Testament was written . . . and for nearly seventy years before it was completed.

Jesus Christ instructed His Apostles to "*Go . . . and preach the Gospel to every creature*". They fulfilled this command primarily by oral teaching. The Bible doesn't show all the truths of our Religion. Too, Saint John's closing of his gospel should not be overlooked here:

"There are, however, many other things that Jesus did; but if every one of these should be written, not even the world itself, I think, could hold the books that would have to be written".

The importance of using both Scripture and Tradition as sources of authority for the Church is magnified by Saint Paul when he states: "So then, brethren, stand firm, and hold the teachings that you have learned,

whether by word or by letter of ours" (2 Thessalonians, 2:15). So, the Bible remains a rule of faith for us, but not the only rule; there is also Tradition.

Catholic and Non-Catholic Services

I wonder if you've ever asked yourself the question: "Why is it that Catholics don't attend non-Catholic services?" We do attend them occasionally; and with full permission of Church authorities. To show respect



for our friends who have died, we may attend the funeral services in non-Catholic Churches. And the same follows for occasions such as weddings. Attendance under these circumstances is understood to be a gesture of friendship and courtesy; it does not involve any formal participation in the services as such.

But, outside of these and similar cases, we don't attend non-Catholic services. We refrain from attending these services for this reason: to attend such services without a good reason (such as I've mentioned) would indicate, implicitly at least, that all religions are equally valid and true. This would lead to the conclusion that 'one religion is as good as

another'; and, frankly, we don't agree with this aspect of religious indifferentism. We hold that Christ founded one Church, and not many Churches; we teach that this Church founded by Our Lord is the Holy, Roman, Catholic Church which He Himself called "*My Church*". And so, if nothing else, we're being consistent by not actively participating in non-Catholic services.

Birth and Birth Control



First of all, the Church does not forbid birth control; it forbids control of birth when it is accomplished by unnatural or unethical means. So, we see that the Catholic Church is not opposed to birth control when this is accomplished by natural means, such as abstinence or continence and for a serious reason. The conjugal act has two ends and purposes: primary and secondary. The primary and objective end is the procreation of offspring; the secondary and subjective end is the fostering of their mutual love; in these circumstances the sensual pleasure accompanying the action is legitimate and desirable.

The law forbidding control of birth is more than a disciplinary rule binding only on Catholics. It is a natural law which binds

all people. A theologian explains it this way: "Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose, sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious."

Catholic Schools

A friend once asked me why we're opposed to public schools. I quickly pointed out that Catholics are not opposed to public schools as such. It's more a question, I think, of preference rather than opposition. We prefer Catholic schools because we believe public schools to be deficient in what we sincerely consider an important element of true education: religion.



The Catholic school, more often called the parochial school, doesn't teach religion at the expense of secular subjects. It offers courses that are found in other schools. Secular education and religious training are combined, resulting in the necessary knowledge of both body and soul.

Catholics are so deeply convinced of the need for religious training that, in addition to supporting public schools, they also

support, whenever possible, their own schools. With us, it's a question of believing that religion is something to be lived daily, and not a matter of mere occasional observance. Christian education doesn't hinder one's secular education; it helps it.

* * *

I'm just realizing that this has become almost a book rather than a simple message. The reason for this, I believe, is twofold: first, the subject at hand is so inclusive and enormous that I couldn't help but mention the things I did; and secondly, I did want to acquaint you with these few topics in a somewhat-detailed way.

You might easily think of other subjects I might discuss with you. If so, maybe one of your Catholic friends could help explain the teachings about which you are curious. And, there are books available on this sort of thing too. Better, still, why not contact a Catholic Priest for more information?

I've written these lines to you in all sincerity and kindness. I honestly admire people who are true to their religion. My primary reason for writing you is not to try to give a number of reasons why you should

become a Catholic. I've tried simply to present some of the things I thought you might like to know about my Church, the Catholic Church.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Philip P. Bruni

* * *

“THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE,
AS THOU, FATHER, IN ME AND I IN
THEE; THAT THEY ALSO MAY BE
ONE IN US; THAT THE WORLD MAY
BELIEVE THAT THOU HAS SENT
ME”.

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Rev. Philip B. Lewis

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