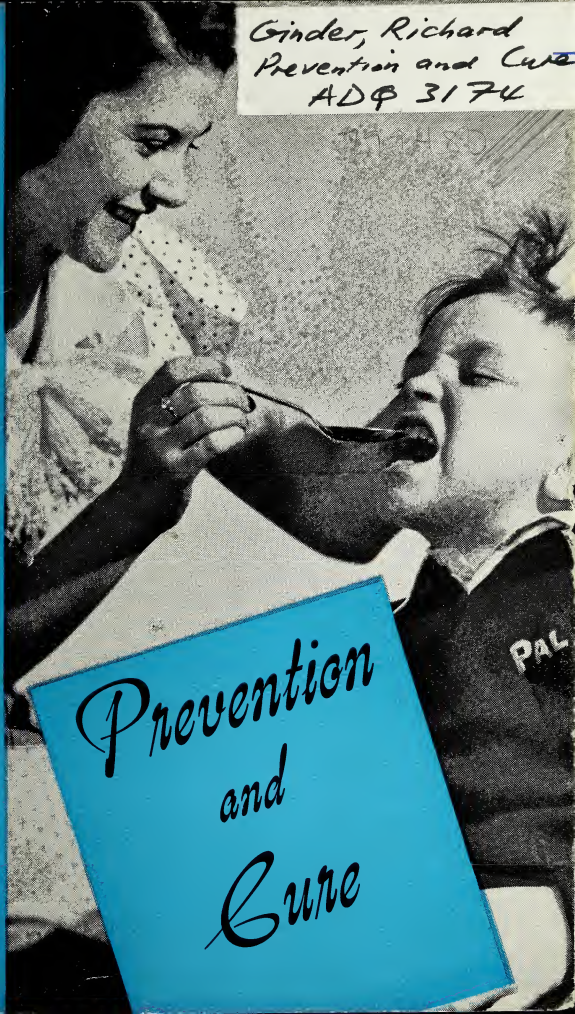


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by

RICHARD GINDER

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PREVENTION AND CURE

by

RICHARD GINDER

HAVE you ever come home from the market on a Saturday noon and realized, with a sinking feeling, that you've not nearly as much money as you ought to have? You count your change, and then you check over your groceries, and you sit down and try to think back over the morning. It dawns on you finally that you've been short-changed somewhere along the line. You get sore as a boil, right away. You're angry that anyone should have been small enough to play such a trick on you, and you're angry that you should have been careless enough to let him get away with it.

That isn't the end of the story, though. God is angry, too. After all, it's His

world and He's running it. Some years ago, He gave us the law, in the lightning and thunder atop Mt. Sinai, "Thou shalt not steal." That niggardly, thieving clerk not only did you an injustice, but he offended the good God as well and laid himself open to divine retribution, for God is not mocked, as the Bible says.

Every injustice, every sin of any sort, is an insult to the Majesty of Him who governs the universe. Some there are who sin in secret, alone, as they think, by themselves; but God is there, too. Others sin with the consent of their partners, horrible, loathesome crimes, which might well turn a decent man's stomach. Their action does no one harm, they think, for both of them have agreed to satisfy a common desire—but God is there, too, standing watch over the whole abominable business.

It's Up to God

If sin is an offense first of all against the Most High, then it's up to Him to settle on terms of forgiveness, if any. We have no right to say how we'll have our sin forgiven. We haven't the power.

We're like men who have stepped casually out of an airplane. We may lie on the ground and nurse our injuries, we can wish and wish and wish that we were back in the plane, but it's up to the pilot to come back down for us, unless some other worldly power can pick us up and put us right back in our place.

As a matter of fact, God has considered the problem of sin and has decided, first, to help us keep from sin, and then, should we slip into sin, to forgive us and give us a fresh start.

He sent His own eternal Son, God with Himself, to earth, and fitted Him with a body like ours. This Jesus lived thirty-three years with men, leading an absolutely sinless life, and showing us, the while, how He did it. Then He let it seem that the power of sin had won a victory over Him. He let a former friend hand Him over to wicked men, who killed Him. It was a horrible death. They beat Him unmercifully. They slapped and shoved Him, and spat on Him, and manhandled Him. They tried to make a fool of Him. When they were tired of all this, they took Him out and nailed Him, hand and

foot to a cross, where He hung for three hours, until He died from exhaustion and the loss of blood.

It wasn't much of a victory for sin, because that happened on Friday, and Jesus came back on Sunday morning, just as healthy as He had ever been during His life. He conquered sin and was the first man to return from the other side of the grave. Being God at the same time, He could do that; and coming from God as it did, His promise that we, too, should rise up again after death means everything to us.

Jesus Hated Sin

What Jesus had uppermost in His mind when He came to earth was the breaking of sin's power over us. He hated evil, as God hates it, and He wanted to give us a hatred of it like His own. To carry on this campaign against sin, after He should leave the earth and join His Father, He got together a few men and told them they should go on acting in His name after His departure. He taught them as much as they could learn during

the three years they were with Him, but before He went, He promised that God, the Holy Spirit, would carry on where He had left off, showing them what to say and do. And because He knew that men are naturally envious and jealous, He took care to make one of those men Chief, so that there could never be any question of who was to have the final say-so in any matter.

That was the beginning of the Christian Church—those few men, headed by St. Peter, and taught personally by Jesus. They ruled the believers with gentle firmness.

“May we eat pork?”—the believers asked.

“Yes,” answered the bishops, as they were soon called.

“Must a man be circumcised when he turns Christian?”

“No,” came the answer.

All through the centuries the bishops answered questions like that, being guided always and directed by their chief-bishop, the successor of St. Peter,

“Papa,” as the Romans affectionately called him, giving us the English word “Pope.”

She Knows and Teaches the Answers

Today the Christian Church (excepting those persons who have quit to follow their own mind on things) has a neat and most systematic body of principles covering every human act. No Christian need worry and fret over whether or not he's doing wrong. After more than nineteen centuries of helping people, the Catholic Church knows very well the difference between right and wrong. She has had the unfailing light of the Holy Spirit all during those years.

She takes her children, when they are six or seven, and teaches them the Ten Commandments. As they grow older, she goes deeper and deeper into the Commandments. She turns to the virtues and makes a systematic study of them. She shows the child what leads people into sin, so that he may steer clear of it. She teaches him how to phrase his little prayer of sorrow to Almighty God, if he should slip into sin.

How does she know all these things? Well, let me ask if any church has had more experience than the Catholic Church; is any church older? Has any church ever had more members? Has any church examined more consciences and heard more tales of grief?

It isn't enough, either, just to teach these things to children. The Church has found that she must keep going over them, time after time. For that reason she has what she calls missions, something a little on the order of the non-Catholic revival-meetings, lasting a week, during which a specially trained priest reviews the whole thing, night after night. She has retreats, during which men and women retire to a monastery or convent for a few days or a week in which to pray and think over the things of eternity. She has the sermons, given at Mass and at evening devotions, especially during Lent, when the people may hear a course of eighteen or twenty sermons on one theme. And she urges the faithful to kneel at their beds

every night and look back over the day to see where they may have sinned. They are to profit by this flashback in learning just how it was that they came to offend God, so that they can take better care for the future that it won't happen again.

Spotting Danger

This is all a matter of showing sincere believers the difference between right and wrong. It's a matter of playing spotlights over the rocks and shallows which might wreck our little boat for us. How can a man keep from wrong if he's not quite sure of what wrong is? Or what if a man forms a habit in good faith and then learns, one day, that his habit is all wrong, that every time he does that certain action, he's offending God and hurting himself? Then he's in a fix. He has a sinful habit, and habits are pretty hard things to break.

To help a man repent of the wrongs he's done—and that isn't always easy—the Catholic Church keeps reminding him that it was sin which nailed Jesus

to the cross. She has images made of the Lord hanging on that cross, for an image can show more than ten pictures, can say more than thousands of words. She asks devout believers to hang these images in their homes, where they can see them when they're tempted. She puts one in every classroom of her schools. There is one on every altar. Her bishops carry the image on their breasts, the image leads her processions, and many of the believers carry it with them on their person. It is what we call a crucifix.

Has anything been left undone in this system of education? Could the Church do more, in the way of preventing sin?

We haven't spoken of the Mass, of Holy Communion, or of the many other ways in which Catholics strengthen themselves for battle against the evil one; but now we want to see how God heals the injuries of those who have suffered in their duels with the devil—for men are weak and too often they yield to sin in spite of all precautions.

God Prescribes the Cure

Sin is an insult to God. It's up to Him, then, to forgive it, if He will. Jesus, being God, forgave sin. We think at once of the Magdalen, of the woman taken in adultery, of the palsied man who was healed first and then forgiven, and of the many other sinners whose forgiveness by Jesus is mentioned in the Gospel.

Now sin can be compared with disease. It's something which attacks the weak and, like disease, we have sin always with us. But Jesus was only with us thirty-three years. We still have the disease, but our Doctor has gone away. Has He left no prescriptions? He would have been unreasonable, don't you think, had He not? After all, He had dedicated His life to a war on sin, down to His last breath on the cross.

As we might have expected, Jesus gave His Church the power to forgive sins in His Name. It was Easter Evening when He came to His Apostles and said to them:

“Peace be to you! 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."—Jn. 20: 21-23

Now they were made physicians of souls, with the power to heal spiritual injuries in the Name of God. Elsewhere, the Lord said: "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."—Mt. 28: 19-20

It is this order that has sent Christian missionaries to the ends of the earth. But if there is need to preach to people, and baptize them, is there not an equal need to forgive their sins? The Apostles, of course, handed down their power to preach, baptize and forgive sins. The Lord never meant this to die with their bodies.

We know that the Apostles used this

power. St. Paul, referring to himself and his brother-bishops, says: "All things are from God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation. For God was truly in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself by not reckoning against men their sins and by entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. On behalf of Christ, therefore, we are acting as ambassadors, God as it were, appealing through us."—II Cor. 5: 18-20

The Priest a Spiritual Doctor

Notice the Godly genius which inspires Christ to direct the forgiveness of sins through confession; because, you know, for century after century from the very beginning, Christians have had their sins forgiven after telling them to a priest. In the pulpit a priest shoots at random, as it were, against the common evils of his people, but in the confessional he is a dead shot. It is there that the spiritual doctor prescribes for individual cases. This is where he hears the symp-

toms, and takes the pulse and temperature of the ailing soul. It fits in perfectly with the system of spiritual guidance left to us by Christ. Here we have a checkup on sorrow for sin. We have the clear-eyed judgment of a second party on our motives. The priest insists that we right the wrongs we have done, as far as we are able. Confession is humiliating, certainly, and a terrible burden on our natural pride; in fact, it is precisely that which makes it such a splendid test of sincerity.

Secrecy? No secret is better kept than that of the confessional. We might as well have shouted our troubles down a well. Have you ever in your life heard the sins of anyone else from the lips of a priest, even second or third-hand? A priest would have his tongue torn out rather than tell what the tiniest child may have confided to him in the confessional.

Best of all, the confessional brings peace of mind, with its assurance of forgiveness. Jesus has given His word:

“Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.” Could anyone have a better guarantee than this promise of Christ’s? It gives us strength to make a fresh start, with the advice and encouragement of our spiritual doctor still sounding in our ear.

Remember, whatever one may think of confession, it isn’t ours to say how sin shall be forgiven. Sin is an offense against God. He is the only one who can rightly dictate the terms of forgiveness.



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