

Does it Pay to be a Catholic



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No 52



Why the Knights of Columbus Advertise Catholic Faith

The reason is simple. We Catholics want our non-Catholic friends and neighbors to know us as we really are and not as we are some times mistakenly represented.

We are confident that when our religious Faith is better understood by those who do not share it, mutual understanding will promote the good-will which is so necessary in a predominantly Christian country whose government is designed to serve all the people—no matter how much their religious convictions may differ.

American Catholics are convinced that as the teachings of Christ widely and firmly take hold of the hearts and conduct of our people, we shall remain free in the sense that Christ promised (John VIII, 31-38), and in the manner planned by the Founding Fathers of this republic.

Despite the plainly stated will of the Good Shepherd that there be "one fold and one shepherd," the differences in the understanding of Christ's teaching are plainly evident. It has rightfully been called "the scandal of a divided Christianity."

If there is anything which will gather together the scattered flock of Christ, it is the nationwide understanding of the Savior, what He did and how He intended mankind to benefit by the Redemption.

To this end, we wish our fellow-Americans to become acquainted with the teachings of Christ as the Catholic Church has faithfully presented them, since the day the apostles invaded the nations of the world in willing and courageous obedience to Christ's command: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. XXVIII, 19).

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DOES IT PAY TO BE A CATHOLIC?



Those who live up to their obligations as Catholics have learned by experience that the Catholic religion is not an *easy* one. Catholics must obey some very serious laws and fulfill burdensome duties, which they would not have to do if they were not Catholics.

But millions of Catholics keep on obeying these laws and fulfilling these duties even though they know that belonging to some other religion would be less demanding.

Why? Because Catholics are convinced that the Catholic religion is the one, true religion given to us by God Himself to enable us to fulfill our obligations as creatures to Him, our Creator, and to help us to be as happy as we can be here on earth and to be happy with Him forever in Heaven.

But that is not the only reason why Catholics keep on being Catholics. Any Catholic who gives to God the reasonable service which the Catholic religion asks for, who knows and understands what his religion and its beliefs and practices can do for him, knows also that he keeps on being a Catholic because *it pays to be a Catholic.*

Non-Catholics, of course, often wonder about this. "What," they ask, "is there in the Catholic religion that compels acceptance of religious duties of such exacting character?" And many of them become curious about Catholicism and ask themselves: "Has the Catholic religion anything to offer me?"

For the benefit of anyone seeking an answer to this question, the following will make clear the reasons why we say it pays to be a Catholic.

1. *Why Catholics are sure of what they believe.*

We are convinced that Jesus Christ existed and that He was God; that He founded a Church for all men: that He sent the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to guide that Church; that consequently His Church is infallible when it teaches what we must believe and do in order to serve God truly. We know that, despite all the powers on earth and in hell, Christ's Church can neither deceive nor fail us.

All the essential teachings and practices of the Catholic religion are contained in the little catechism. These are so simple that a child can

easily be taught to understand them, and yet they answer the profoundest queries and deepest doubts of the scholar, philosopher or theologian. The lessons of the Catholic catechism outline the only true philosophy of life. Throughout the centuries, atheists, agnostics and scoffers have attacked the catechism, but not once have they succeeded in proving one of its doctrines false.

2. Catholic teaching agrees with common sense.

In the entire range of Catholic belief there is not a single contradiction. All the teachings fit together like the parts of a pattern or well-designed plan which appeals to man's reason and common sense. As an example, other Christian sects, as a general rule, follow the practice of some kind of baptism for the removal of Original Sin. But they deny that Christ established any other sacrament for the purpose of removing sins committed after baptism, especially confession. This overlooks the big difficulty of getting rid of the guilt of sin which man is capable of committing *after* Baptism. How obtain forgiveness for that? The Catholic Sacraments include the Sacrament of Penance, or Confession, which is reasonable and also fulfills the commission of Christ to His apostles and their successors: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them."

3. The Catholic Church is on the right side of things.

Aside from the purely spiritual guidance a Catholic receives from his Church, he feels secure in follow-

ing the direction of the Church in matters of everyday conduct. The Catholic Church is invariably on the right side even in questions that are not wholly religious, but which have lasting effects on man's prosperity, both temporal and spiritual. For example:

Government:

The Bill of Rights and the Constitution of the United States might have been written by a Catholic philosopher, so closely are they in accord with traditional Catholic teaching on political science. The Catholic Church, both by proclamation and action, has always stoutly resisted tyranny, whether in the form of the divine right of kings or the totalitarian state seeking to change free citizens into slaves deprived of their basic human rights.

Economic Justice:

In the days when the workers had little protection, it was churchmen like Pope Leo XIII, Cardinal Manning and Cardinal Gibbons who fought their battles and gained for them a legal recognition of their right to organize. Today, while the Catholic Church still favors unions, it reminds both capital and labor of their solemn obligations in justice and charity toward each other and their fellow-citizens.

Interracial Justice:

Where Catholic education and culture have full freedom, the rights and dignity of man as a creature of God are upheld without discrimination because of color or nationality. The Catholic who, out of racial

prejudice, would practice discrimination in basic rights, would fail his religion.

World Peace:

The Catholic Church has worked incessantly for the avoidance of war, and, when wars do occur, for the alleviation of the misery they cause. Since the disruption of Christian unity in consequence of the division into many sects, its efforts to prevent war and establish a just and lasting peace have been severely handicapped.

Education:

The Catholic Church stands squarely behind the right of parents to have their children educated in schools that teach religion and morality.

4. The Catholic Church does not compromise.

We all admire a man of principle. But most of us have nothing but contempt for one who compromises his convictions for some unworthy gain. So, too, it is in religion. *The Church instituted by Christ cannot change its basic teachings and moral tenets to conform with changing human practices and varying human opinions. To do so would destroy its right to the respect and confidence of thinking men.*

In all its history, the Catholic Church has never compromised its doctrines and moral principles. There have been occasions when it could have averted persecution, or saved for itself entire nations, if it would have yielded on certain points of belief and morals. It

could not compromise and at the same time remain true to its divine commission to "teach all nations whatsoever I have commanded you."

It would be much easier for the Catholic Church and much easier for the members of the Catholic Church, for example, if it could approve divorce and birth-prevention, or be content with the secular education of public schools. But to do this, the Church would have to compromise the precepts of the Bible, its traditional teaching, and the natural and revealed moral law.

Once the Catholic Church would compromise on these and other fundamental truths, it would falsify its claim of being the one and only true Church of Jesus Christ, and its members, as well as all the people in the world, could have no confidence in it.

5. The Catholic Church alone goes back to the apostles.

When Catholics say the Apostles' Creed, they know with certainty that they are professing belief in fundamental truths with exactly the same interpretation as did the early Christian martyrs and the first converts of the apostles. When Catholics assist at Mass, or receive any one of the seven sacraments, they know that they are attending the same Mass and receiving the same sacraments as did the first Christians. When Catholics obey the Pope as the supreme spiritual ruler of Christendom on earth, they know that they are doing the same as the early Christians, who always listened to the bishop of Rome as the direct successor of St. Peter.

History easily proves that the Catholic Church alone goes back through the centuries to the Apostles, and that it alone can claim Christ for its founder. The oldest non-Catholic Christian sect dates back a little more than 400 years, while others are of more recent origin. So between Christ and these non-Catholic sects, historically, there is a gap of about 1600 years.

6. *The Catholic Church has order and discipline.*

Any organization, whether in the business, civic or social field, that does not have discipline and order, soon falls to ruin. So, too, in a religion. If ministers can defy their bishop, and laymen dictate to a pastor, one could hardly find the peace and smooth-functioning authority of the gentle, yet uncompromising, Christ.

The Catholic Church has order and discipline, often to the amazement of a ruthless, self-willed world. Two factors contribute to this: a set of laws known as Canon Law, that have been tested and found beneficial for centuries, and the deep reverence that each fervent Catholic has for his pastor, his bishop and the Holy Father. This spirit of intelligent obedience enables Catholic leaders to accomplish wonders in both the home and foreign mission fields, as well as in the established parishes in the organized dioceses of the Catholic Church.

7. *The Catholic Church teaches that all human beings are entitled to freedom of conscience.*

Catholics are trained to respect

the religious convictions of others, even though they do not agree with them. They are taught that to ridicule, despise or calumniate another person's religion is a sin. This tolerance, however, does not extend to any error which may be contained in the other person's religion. For that reason, the Catholic may speak out against doctrines which he recognizes as false, but not in condemnation of those who hold these false beliefs. Catholic priests and people are content to propagate the truth of their own religion, being convinced that the best way to gain the confidence, respect and conviction of non-Catholics is to hold before them the real teaching and practice of the Catholic Church and the edifying example of millions of fervent Catholics.

8. *The Catholic religion presents a sane view of life.*

Some of the pleasures and recreations of life which are regarded as wholesome and harmless by many Christians, are condemned as sinful by others. Dancing, card playing, even going to a baseball game on Sunday, are branded by some as violations of the laws of God and the principles of Christian living. Enactment of various so-called "blue laws" were the results of the conviction of some Christians that moral behavior should be enforced by civil laws.

While the Catholic Church is unbending in matters of principle, in telling its members what is morally right and wrong, it does not confuse their conscience by declaring reasonable human pleasures and

forms of recreation to be sinful. Individuals, of course, sometimes debase even wholesome pleasures by excesses and immoderation, just as some turn their "daily bread" into gluttony. The sinfulness is not in the pleasure or amusement itself, but in the individual's unmoral or immoral indulgence. Catholic teaching is clear-cut and adamant in condemnation of such excesses.

9. *The Catholic religion helps in sorrow.*

It is especially in time of sorrow and at death that a Catholic most appreciates his faith. His religion can be counted on to alleviate much of his sorrow, not just by sympathy, but by positive help. If it is worldly misfortune, the Church will usually be there to comfort and relieve; if it be physical pain, so often the Church will be there at the bedside in the habit of a nursing nun; if it be moral or mental anguish, the confessional and the rectory door are always open; if it be death, there will be the priest, with the last sacraments and prayers for the dying. Not without reason do we so often hear the expression from the troubled lips: "Father, I do not know what I would do, without my Catholic Faith."

10. *The Catholic religion brings peace of conscience.*

Gilbert K. Chesterton, England's famed writer, on being asked why he became a Catholic, replied: "Because I wanted to be sure my sins were forgiven." Every adult human being, unless he has perverted his conscience by repeated serious sin,

has a sense of guilt, and this in proportion to the number of grievous sins he may have committed. The problem is now to make sure that these sins are forgiven.

To a pagan or an unbeliever this must be a perplexing problem. Mere denial of God is not going to change one's human nature. Conscience accuses even the man who does not believe in God, and for such a man there is no one to turn to for forgiveness. Those who do not recognize the Sacrament of Penance as administered by the Catholic Church are scarcely in a more favorable position. For the Catholic Church alone claims the right to dispense God's forgiveness of sins by virtue of Christ's clearly-stated commission: "Whose sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven them; whose sins ye shall retain, they are retained."

Catholics, after sincerely trying to make a good confession, with true sorrow for their sins and with a firm determination not to sin again with the help of God's graces, have no doubts about the forgiveness of their sins. Common sense is on their side, too, as we have pointed out before, for they are confident that if Christ gave His Church one sacrament (Baptism) to supply them with grace in the beginning, He surely must have instituted another sacrament by which they could obtain with certainty the forgiveness of sins committed after baptism and so be restored to God's grace and friendship.

11. *The Catholic Church helps make good citizens.*

It is sometimes alleged that Cath-

olics owe allegiance to a foreign ruler and therefore cannot be loyal citizens of their country. This accusation has been refuted long ago by the repeated demonstration of loyalty by Catholic citizens to whatever nation they owed allegiance. Conspicuous examples of this loyalty have been displayed by U. S. and Canadian Catholics since the first white settler came to America.

The authority that St. Peter and his successors, the Popes, received from Christ was entirely in the spiritual realm. To this Catholics the world over subscribe completely, rightfully convinced that their religious convictions are no business of any government. Now, as in the past, it is necessary for the Pope to be independent of any civil ruler. For that reason he now has Vatican City, a sovereign state recognized by the nations of the world and whose only citizens are those who dwell within its confines. Catholics in all other parts of the world owe their civil allegiance to the lawfully constituted authority under which they live.

The Catholic Church moulds good citizens because it teaches that patriotism is a moral virtue binding in conscience. This is founded upon Catholic doctrine, and is a proper recognition of the rights of civil government to rule for the common temporal good. Moreover, the Catholic Church actively supports this training by inculcating respect for God, from whom all legitimate authority derives its right to rule, and for His moral laws, without which obedience to civil law would ultimately collapse. The Catholic is

especially taught reverence for the oath, upon which depends the integrity of our courts, civil officials and our fellow-citizens.

12. *The Catholic Church supports the family.*

It is apparent that in many instances, marriage and family life are in a sad state today. For proof of this ask any of the thousands of victims of the divorce courts or any unfortunate child of a broken home. It is not now uncommon for thoughtful young people to hesitate long before they pledge their lives before an altar. Lax, immoral, hypocritical divorce laws have contributed to this breakdown. Another is the easy, quick ways of marrying which heedless people often use for binding not only their first marital knot, but often a second, third or more. And back of it all is often a callous, material view that takes all that is holy and moral and divine and obligatory out of Matrimony.

The Catholic Church alone upholds marriage as it should be and as God ordained it to be. This is not something new for the Church; it is as old as the words of Our Lord and the Bible which clearly and forcefully condemn remarriage after divorce, birth prevention, neglect of children, and adultery. If the Catholic Church had been lenient with Henry VIII and permitted him to put away his lawful wife Catherine to marry Anne Boleyn, it probably could have kept all England for the faith and avoided three centuries of persecution. The Church could not, however, compromise the divine law regarding marriage any more than

it could encourage a violation of any other of the ten commandments.

Catholics entering marriage believe that they are bound by their marriage vow, no matter what happens, until death. Therefore, Catholic marriages usually endure and are successful.

Catholics believe and are convinced that marriage between baptized persons is a sacrament. Therefore they look reverently upon their wedded life as a holy state, comparable, in the words of St. Paul, to the union of Christ and His Church.

Catholics believe that in the exercise of their marital rights God usually cooperates with them in bringing a new life into the world. Consequently, Catholic marriages are usually blessed with children.

Catholic young people, as a rule, do not rush into marriage. Their training and the laws of the Church cause them to assume these solemn obligations only after due instruction, reflection and prayer. This is marriage as it should be; this is marriage as it is in the eyes of God.

In the close intimacy of marriage, it can be difficult to live happily with a partner with whom you cannot kneel down and pray. Still more difficult must it be to remain truly contented with a husband or wife with whom you disagree on moral principles, such as birth-control, and to have the torturing certainty that instead of helping you to heaven, your companion in life is dragging you down to hell. It must be an uncomfortable feeling to realize that you are bound by vow to a partner who may not feel equally bound. These factors, and a host of others,

prompt the Church to discourage mixed marriages involving a Catholic.

A devout Catholic will find the best choice for an enduring, happy marriage is union with another good Catholic. Then both parties are agreed on the essentials of a happy marriage—life together until death, for better or worse; mutual understanding of right or wrong in marriage; a mutual willingness to pray together, go to confession together, receive Holy Communion together. Best of all, amidst the hardships and pitfalls of family life, a man and wife thus united have the comforting assurance that their marriage is a holy sacrament, that in fidelity to each other and in the cares of life, the family will be constantly aided by special graces where human effort alone would surely fail.

13. *The Catholic religion helps parents to give their children a true education.*

Catholic parents feel that they have a decided advantage over non-Catholic parents in the education of their children. Many non-Catholic parents are deeply concerned regarding the education of their children, and yet they have no choice but to send them to a public school where moral and religious training are barred by law. Catholic parents can feel sure that their children are getting not only a sound academic training, but protection against any materialistic influences that might conflict with basic Catholic philosophy.

Catholic parents believe, in fact, that with religion prohibited in pub-

lic schools, the only really democratic schools are private schools where parents can exercise their God-given, Constitution-guaranteed right of educating their children according to their conscience. Maintenance of the vast parochial school system, of course, with its double burden of taxation, is a heavy load on Catholic parents. They are happy to bear it, however, as it guarantees that their children receive expert training, especially in morality and religion.

14. *Catholics can and do become saints.*

In his battle with the difficulties and dangers of life, the Catholic is certain that he is not alone. Most often in his youth he has had the priceless advantage of a good Catholic home and a Catholic school training. All through his years he has had the advantage of the guidance and encouragement of specialists in human and divine welfare, his priests. He shares the company and the help of the saints in heaven, who have won their goal for all eternity and will intercede for him with God in heaven. And every Catholic is convinced he has the opportunity and the help he needs to become a saint, just as many Catholics have become saints before him.

In a general sense, a saint is anyone who dies in the state of grace and gains eternal happiness. But most often the word "saints" is intended to mean those canonized and declared by the Church to have attained with certainty a high place in heaven. Such a declaration is made by the Church only after a most

critical examination of their heroic lives and the miracles that God has worked in response to their prayers.

Scarcely anyone denies that there were saints in the apostolic age and during the first centuries of Christianity. But many say that sainthood is no longer achieved in modern times. A religion that would not continue to have saints, would have to be classified as dead. Therefore, if we grant that the Catholic Church was founded by Christ, we can expect that there would be Catholic saints in every century. And that is just what has happened, even down to the first half of this latest twentieth century.

To become a saint, a person must obviously be helped, for sanctity is a supernatural goal that demands, in addition to human effort, supernatural help in the form of God's grace. In the Catholic Church the saints have been inspired in their quest for sublime virtue not only by the Christ-like ideal of the Gospels, but by the numerous lives of Christian heroes who have gone before them. Further, the saints have had the benefit of the corporate prayer and worship of the Church, and the means of grace in the holy sacrifice of the Mass and in the seven sacraments. Without the graces flowing from the Mass, Baptism, Confession and Holy Communion, we believe that no Christian can become a saint.

Every Catholic today has all the helps the saints have had, and every opportunity to become a saint.

15. *The Catholic Church helps at death.*

There is no sermon that preaches man's helplessness more clearly than death. Many people try to avoid thoughts of death and when it comes to them, or to a loved one, they find nothing in their purely materialistic world to reassure or console them.

The old adage that "the Catholic religion is hard to live in, but easy to die in," holds a lot of truth. Catholics facing death have the advantage of a lifetime of training for the apprehensions of life's end, and the added assurance of the last sacraments of the Church. While by nature it is no easier for Catholics to contemplate death than it is for others, they are greatly helped to meet it calmly and confidently because of their religious training and the assurance of the sacraments. Catholics pray for a happy death day after day, and they try to live in such a way that they will be ready for death whenever it may come.

A Catholic funeral is not a cold, hopeless affair. The bereaved, though under earth's most bitter loss and parting, are encouraged by a firm trust of reunion in heaven. Likewise they know they can help the departed one by prayer and be helped in return, a consolation that lightens the burden of grief when death comes. Friends come to the wake, not merely to express their sympathy, but to kneel and recite the rosary together for the soul of the deceased. There is real comfort in that. The Requiem Mass, the blessing of the grave, the entire funeral service—all breathe of hope that is stronger than the power of death.

All the world, of course, searches for happiness. Some try to find it in work, others in pleasure; some in idleness and repose, others in feverish activity; some by doing the will of God, others by falling into sin. No one is perfectly satisfied on earth; many, as a poet states it, "live lives of quiet despair." We cannot be completely contented until we reach heaven, but only the few will acknowledge this fact. Most people live as though they would exist on earth forever.

Catholics are sure that in heaven we shall be perfectly happy because the yearnings of our mind and heart will be completely satisfied. We shall behold God as the Infinite Truth, and our intellect will be content; also as the Infinite Good, and our will shall be at rest. In this union with our Creator, all the good and reasonable desires of our human nature will be fulfilled. There will be no rebellion of the passions, as here on earth, no frustration, no incompleteness, no growing tired of what we have—in other words, in the fulfillment of one's destiny there will be perfect order.

Catholics ought to be the happiest people on earth, because already in this life they have begun to walk in unity with God. Theirs is the special privilege and dignity of being part of the living body or organism of which Christ is the Head and they the members. For them grace is not merely an insurance against hell but a sharing in the life of God.

The certainty of belonging to the true fold, the peace of conscience after a good confession, the delight

of receiving Holy Communion, the sense of security and strength at the Holy Sacrifice, the guidance of one's priests in every danger and difficulty, the companionship of the saints both here and especially in heaven, the special protection of our Blessed Mother, the evidence of love for each one of us on the part of our Divine Lord—all these

and many more factors contribute to the definite purpose of a Catholic life. Although his religion is strict and exacting in all that God demands, a faith that demands penance, self-sacrifice and discipline, every Catholic knows that the rewards of his faith far outweigh all the difficulties and duties it imposes on him.

"It is evident that the story of my life up to the day of my baptism is hardly the adequate story of my 'conversion.' My conversion is still going on. Conversion is something that is prolonged over a whole lifetime. Its progress leads it over a succession of peaks and valleys, but normally the ascent is continuous in the sense that each new valley is higher than the last one.

"I have said that the problem of the Christian life is not solved by baptism alone. Sanctifying grace, which makes us 'live in Christ' and nourishes us with the fruits of His Passion and endows us with a share in His risen glory, is a talent that has to be increased and developed. We must enter deeper and deeper into this life of Christ. We must give ourselves over more and more fully to the mighty and transforming power of grace. Why? Because, as I have said, the purpose of our lives is to make us more and more productive members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

"We increase and deepen our participation in the life of the Body by the activity of our minds and wills, illuminated and guided by the Holy Ghost. We must therefore keep growing in our knowledge and love of God and in our love for other men. The power of good operative habits must take ever greater and greater hold upon us. The Truth we believe in must work itself more and more fully into the very substance of our lives until our whole existence is nothing but vision and love." Where I Found Christ—Thomas Merton.

MUST YOU BE A CATHOLIC?

Many non-Catholics, of course, would be indignant if asked such a question. Yet it is a question which we believe is reasonable and deserving of reasonable consideration.

Emphasis in the question is on the word "must." We are not asking whether it is a *good* thing to be a Catholic, or a *lawful* thing, or a *rewarding* thing. We are asking you to consider whether you are *bound* to be a Catholic, whether that is the only thing you can be if you are interested in saving your soul. Is there any kind of force that *should* be driving you into the Catholic Church?

When we say, "*Must* you be a Catholic?", we mean: "Are there compelling reasons that make it illogical, unreasonable and personally disastrous for you to be anything *other* than a Catholic?"

There are only a few things other than a Catholic that you can be. 1) You can be an irreligious person, who does not believe that religion is necessary. In that case you either maintain that there is no God, or that you do not know anything about God. 2) You may give your



allegiance, theoretical or practical or both, to a non-Christian religion. 3) Or you may be a Christian of one of the non-Catholic sects, in which case you are taking the position that the apostolic Church has failed, which Christ promised it could not do. If you take the position that any or all of the non-

Catholic Christian sects are equally authentic in their interpretation of the teachings of Christ, you are confronted by the troubling fact that they do not all agree in their interpretations.

Therefore, these are the four choices that lie before you: to be a Catholic, to be irreligious, to be religious without accepting Christ, or to be a non-Catholic Christian. There is nothing else you can be; if you belong to one of the four classes, you cannot belong to any of the others. It is our contention that the evidence, the logical reasoning, the historical facts, the express will of Christ, all oblige you to become a Catholic. We are aware that you might be logically convinced that you should be a Catholic, yet might not become one for want of God's grace. The necessary grace will be

given you, however, if you ask humbly for it while considering the evidence presented here to aid your conscience in making a choice of religion.

The reasons for being Catholic are inescapably bound up with the reasons why you should *not* belong to one of the other three classes into which men are divided by reason of their attitude to religion. If, therefore, you can be convinced that you must not be 1) irreligious, 2) a non-Christian religious person, 3) a sectarian Christian, you will find yourself in the happy position of knowing just exactly what you must be, and that is a Catholic. Consider briefly the reasons that should convince you:

Need For Religion

1. You must not be irreligious because you cannot escape an essential relationship between yourself and God which demands both recognition and action.

The simplest general definition of religion is this: "Man's communication with God based on God's communication with man." If you are justified in throwing off all religion, you can be so only on the assumption that God has made no communication to you. In that case you must say either that there is no God, or God cannot be recognized, or God is not interested in you, or God has never communicated anything to you.

For brevity, let's pass up the denial that there is a God on the ground that those who believe this would not profit from any of the other logical conclusions offered here.

We can be equally brief with the notion that God's existence cannot be recognized on the ground that anyone who can look at an effect and state that he can know absolutely nothing about its cause is not ready for a reasonable discussion of anything. A Cadillac-owner who states that he cannot know for certain there is a Cadillac-maker, would be no different from one who, observing creation, should contend it had no Creator.

God Loves You

The fact that God is interested in you is written all over you. It is written in the fact that He made you a lord of creation, a thinking being in the midst of a million mindless objects of His creation. It is evident in the fact that He put the capacity and yearning for unlimited happiness in your very nature. He must have wanted something wonderful to happen to you, and that certainly amounts to "being interested in you."

But has He communicated anything to you? For the moment take just one answer to that question. He has communicated some tremendous practical truths through the manner in which He made you. He gave you a voice; He thus informed you that He wanted you to speak, and to speak the truth. He gave you arms and legs and eyes and ears, designed, like the parts of any object fashioned by any intelligent being, for certain purposes. He wanted you to use them for those purposes.

Above all, He gave you a mind that can recognize purposes, and an urgent sense of moral obligation

called conscience, and a free will to obey these recognized moral obligations. Thus He communicated His will to you. Religion means doing what God wants you to do, and you can see His will in the very way He made you. That is why it is absurd and illogical to be irreligious.

2. You must not be religious without any recognition of Christ as God, because if Christ was God incarnate, you are not intellectually or morally free to ignore this truth. Neither are you free to try to communicate with the invisible God when God actually made Himself visible in Christ to provide the means of communication He wishes us to employ. If religion means man's communication with God based on God's communication with man, then God could have become man only to communicate something to all men.

Miracles

Your reason will tell you that there is nothing contrary to the omnipotence of God in the statement that Christ, if He was God, was limited to one essential means of proving to you that He was God before He communicated anything to you. He had to show Himself to be the master of the universe and of its laws. He did that by His miracles. He manifested ownership and supreme authority over the wind and the waves; over the animals and the trees; over diseased bodies and demoted souls; over death and the grave. What more sufficient sign could you think of asking of Him?

You cannot reasonably say, "But I don't believe in miracles and therefore I don't have to believe

that Christ was God." This might be a logical objection if there were no miracles to prove it. But in the face of the evidence, to say that you do not believe in miracles, is a deliberate closing of your eyes and your mind to evidence of a provable truth.

Your Choice

3. You must not be a non-Catholic Christian, 1) if the Bible tells you that Christ established a Church with authority; 2) if history tells you that, after 1,500 years, men challenged this authority and introduced teachings contrary to those of Christ's Church; 3) if your reason convinces you that no religious sect can claim to be Christ's way of salvation if it is without authority, unity, unchangeability and universality.

Nearly all Christian sects, other than Catholics, call themselves "Bible Christians." By that they mean two things: first, that reliance on the Bible eliminates the need of a Church with authority; second, that the Bible is given by God to individuals with freedom to interpret its text as best they may according to their own lights and inspirations. It is usually thought, by those who call themselves Bible Christians in this sense, that the Bible came into the world in some miraculous manner that replaced all other communications of God to man.

Here are the facts, however, which anyone may check for himself: 1) A Church with authority to teach in the name of Christ was so teaching before the entire New

Testament was written, and much longer before the Church declared its writings inspired by God; 2) That Church decided, with her supreme authority, what actually belonged to the Bible and what did not, and this was when the inspired writings were finally complete, some sixty to seventy years after the death of Christ. 3) That Church finds the charter for her existence and her authority within the pages of the Bible, even within the pages of non-Catholic versions.

The genuine "Bible Christian" is actually the Catholic. He finds in the Bible itself the explanation of why Christ did not deem it necessary to provide a complete Bible until many years after His death. Christ, he knows, commanded His apostles to "teach all nations," to teach "with authority"—("He that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be condemned"); to teach with divine guidance and protection from error ("I am with you all days" — "the gates of hell shall not prevail against my Church"). The Church Christ founded was teaching all nations before the New Testament was composed; the Church Christ founded determined *what* books were inspired and belonged in the Bible as we have it today; and that Church used the Bible after it was composed and authenticated, as a source added to her oral teaching and tradition. Surely the Church that preceded the Bible, that gave the Bible to the world, the Church that is described in the Bible, is the only one that represents the true religion of Christ in the world.

The second condition that makes it illogical to be anything but a Catholic Christian is the fact that "history tells us that men changed in their Bible versions many things that had been accepted as essential Christianity for centuries before they came into existence."

Here you are, living in the twentieth century, and, let us say, you are convinced that Christ is God. You are convinced that the most important thing in life for you is to know what Christ communicated to you. You cannot leap back over the heads of one hundred generations of mankind to ask Christ yourself. But you can go back through those one hundred generations to learn what teachings of Christ, what interpretations of His words and of the Bible, came all the way down to you unchanged.

The Sacraments

If you find, in looking back through history, that some doctrine, like that of the seven sacraments, or that of the Mass as the unbloody renewal of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, was held firmly for fifteen unbroken centuries, beginning with the century of Christ, and that then, fifteen hundred years later, somebody began to teach that there were only three sacraments, or no sacraments, or that the Mass was a superstition, what can you logically conclude? Obviously, you would have to conclude that these new "teachers" had broken with Christ because they had discarded teachings that generations had brought down unchanged from the time of Christ.

This is not, as it may seem, an

oversimplification. It is simple in the sense that Christ must have made it easy for all generations to learn what He said and what He meant by what He said. If He was truly God, it is preposterous to think that He should have become man, taught mankind, and then waited fifteen centuries for somebody to decide that His teaching has been misunderstood from the beginning — for fifteen hundred years. The fact that men did come along and change the teachings accepted by Christ's followers for fifteen centuries is not a matter of opinion. It is a fact of history. It is also a fact that there is one place, one Church, in which the doctrines discarded by these so-called reformers have been held inviolate from the beginning of Christendom.

Unchanging Doctrine

The defense of the changes made by the Reformers is that some churchmen had become corrupt. But the alleged corruption was a moral matter involving individuals and did not call for changes in doctrine such as were proposed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This was no more logical than it would have been for the Apostles to call for a change in Christ's teachings because one of Our Lord's followers, Judas, had betrayed Him. So the Church of Christ must necessarily be the one that has preached and continues to preach the doctrines of Christ without change regardless of the personal failures of individuals to remain true to them.

The third condition that should force your mind to an acceptance of

the Catholic Church as the Church of Christ is "if your reason convinces you that without authority, unity, unchangeability and universality, no religious sect can be said to be Christ's way of salvation for all."

Contradiction

As an excuse for not facing up to the facts of religion, some people maintain that religious truth is beyond human comprehension. Yet these same people manifest complete confidence in their ability to reason on other complex practical and intellectual matters. The agnostic banker who says he cannot learn or know anything about religion because his mind is not capable of knowledge, trusts his mind quite confidently when it comes to the rules and practices of banking. He adds up figures and becomes certain in his conclusions; he assays the value of investments and the collateral of loans and acts confidently on his conclusions.

You can become likewise certain of the true Christian religion according to a few simple tests. Christ spoke with authority; you shall not find His religion in any Church that does not continue to speak with His authority. Christ gave no occasion for anyone to say, "It doesn't matter what you believe." Rather, He said, "He that believeth (what I have taught) shall be saved." Thus all His followers must believe the same things. Christ offers no opening to generations coming after Him for changing or contradicting anything that He said. Therefore you will find His Church marked by unchangeability of doctrine through all the

years. As Christ preached to all men without exception, so His followers will be marked by the sameness of their essential beliefs and practices in any part of the world. Only one Church offers you the fulfillment of these tests. Your mind must tell you that where they are not fulfilled you will not find the religion of Jesus Christ.

It is sad that the compelling simplicity of all these evidences has been muddied by objections that distract individuals from the essential question. The essential question is: where can I find Christ still teaching, strengthening, guiding and saving my soul today? When you are just about to see Him in the Catholic Church, working through human instruments and representatives like His first twelve apostles to save your soul, someone whispers to you some reason why the Catholic Church is not the place where you can find Christ.

Reason Tells You

These whispers are often pure falsehoods—for example, when they tell you that the Catholic hierarchy and clergy are trying to gain political and temporal power. Sometimes they tell the truth to distract you. They say that the clergy are not so holy as they should be, or that this or that clergyman has fallen into sin. Even if this were true, it is no argument against the truth of the Catholic Church, any more than the fall

of Judas was an argument against the divinity of Christ. The Church as Christ's means to save your soul is not dependent upon the personal acts of any individual member of its clergy.

Sometimes these whispers distract you from the truth by quoting an individual text of the Bible and distorting its actual meaning in relation to other texts. Thus some draw up a list of texts in which Christ or other inspired writers speak strongly of the necessity of faith for salvation. Then they add the word "alone" to faith; then they discount or discard the many other directives for salvation given by Christ, such as that you must be baptized, you must receive the Body and Blood of Christ, you must hear His Church. Then they offer you the comforting conclusion that you need only *believe* firmly in Christ to be saved. Obviously, if we believe firmly in Christ we mean believe everything He said and put it into practice. Mere believing is clearly not enough.

This outline of why all men are called to be Catholics may not of itself convince those who have been "distracted" from the truth. We know too that knowledge is not enough to make anyone a Catholic. The grace of God, gained only by humble and submissive prayer, is necessary if one is to find and follow Christ's way to salvation. May you be filled with that grace.

IS IT DIFFICULT TO BECOME A CATHOLIC?

It is not unusual to meet people who, even though they have no deep-rooted antipathies for the Catholic Church, and may even feel attracted to it, have the impression that it is very difficult to become a Catholic. It is even more common to meet Catholics who have a fixed notion that it is exceedingly difficult to be instrumental in leading non-Catholics along the path to the one holy, apostolic, Catholic Church.

That there is difficulty is quite true. But when we sort out and face the kinds of difficulties there actually are, it becomes apparent that they are difficulties which are capable of being faced, analyzed and overcome. Indeed, if this were not true, there would be no point in the invitation that is constantly held out to non-Catholics to approach and see whether they cannot find peace and salvation in the Catholic Church.

Upon examination of different types of individuals, and experience with a large number of them, it becomes possible to classify the difficulties of becoming a Catholic under three categories. They are the following: 1. *Accidentally*, there are



certain grave difficulties that may stand in the way of a person's becoming a Catholic. 2. *Essentially or substantially*, there are never too great difficulties preventing anyone from becoming a Catholic. 3. *Practically*, there are always such difficulties as should naturally be expected and courageously overcome in pursuing so important a goal as that of finding the true religion.

In discussing these various types of difficulties, one must take for granted that the grace of God will be at hand for all who sincerely seek it. Not even those with the least of difficulties to face can become Catholics without God's grace. At the same time the principal always holds that to those who do what they can by themselves, God never denies whatever graces they may need.

1. *Accidental Difficulties*. By the word "accidental" we mean to characterize difficulties that arise from some special circumstances in a person's life which create an extraordinary road-block to their approach to the Catholic Church. They have nothing to do either with the essential appeal of the truth to the human

mind, nor with the power of the mind to find and embrace the truth. Rather they usually stop a person from even making a beginning toward considering whether the truth may be found in the Catholic Church.

Here are several examples of such accidental or circumstantial difficulties:

Falsehoods

a. By far the most common is that which arises from having been subject for many years to a stream of misinformation and mal-education concerning the Catholic Church. Millions of people have had it drummed into their minds from childhood that certain Catholic doctrines and practices are contrary to the teachings of Christ and of the Bible, and that Catholic priests and bishops and lay leaders are sinister characters seeking only the enslavement and impoverishment of those subject to them.

These individuals have never actually looked into the teachings of the Church, nor have they ever known personally any priests or bishops. Their education has been such that they do not want to, or feel that it would be wrong, to do so. It is as much a part of their intellectual convictions that the Catholic Church is terribly and dangerously wrong as is any other information they receive and consider correct. Obviously, this creates an extraordinary difficulty in the way of their ever entering into study of why the Catholic Church claims to be the one true religion of Christ.

b. Another accidental difficulty that keeps some from looking into

the Catholic Church is a way of life that is known to be contrary to what the Catholic Church lays down as the law of Christ for all her children. Most priests have met divorced and remarried non-Catholics who expressed this difficulty somewhat in these words: "I lean toward the Catholic Church. I'd really like to know more about it. But, you see, I've divorced one wife and married another. I know that divorced and remarried persons cannot be real, practicing members of the Catholic Church. At the same time I cannot and will not give up my present partner. So there is not much use in my thinking about becoming a Catholic."

The same difficulty is present for some non-Catholics who are practicing habitual birth-prevention, or living in a continuing state of adultery. They have a leaning toward the Church, but they know that their habitual sins, which they refuse to give up, would prevent them from being good Catholics anyway. So they do not follow up their leaning.

A Hard Choice

c. A third accidental difficulty that some non-Catholics find too much to overcome is the possession of many human, worldly, social and rewarding contacts that would have to be lost or abandoned if they became Catholics. For many, the prospect of such losses is just too great a difficulty to be surmounted, though they are practically convinced that the Catholic religion is the one true religion of Jesus Christ.

d. One more accidental difficulty, is simply too much interest in sen-

sible, material and worldly things. Their job and their ambitions, their home and its comforts, their recreations and amusements, their parties and vacations, are permitted to fill up their lives. They haven't the time nor the interest to be concerned about religion at all.

2. *Essential Difficulties.* By "essential" difficulties in the way of becoming a Catholic, we mean such as might be connected with the very process of preparing to become a Catholic and submitting to the Catholic Church. Actually, these are largely imagined difficulties and none is too great for any normal person to overcome.

You Must Decide

If there is one true religion, if there is any Church to which Christ wants all human beings to belong and through which they are to be saved, it must be essentially easy for any human being to find that Church, to learn its essential teachings and laws, and to become a member. The fact that it is easy, however, does not eliminate the necessity of some effort on the individual's part to ascertain the truth and act upon it when convinced that Christ's religion is not a mere club or fraternity to be "joined" as a matter of convenience.

Experience proves that it is not essentially difficult for anyone in any walk of life, with any background of education, to find and submit to the truth of the Catholic Church. Converts to the Church range from working men and women with only a minimum of schooling, to many of the greatest

geniuses and intellectual giants of every age. All come to the same simple acts of faith and submission. All learn that Christ was God, the only Redeemer and Teacher of mankind; that He founded a Church to dispense the merits of His redemption and to continue His teaching without deviation to the end of time; that the one Church that corresponds to the words of His founding and the purpose and tasks He gave it is the Catholic Church.

The Happy Choice

It is because becoming a Catholic is essentially easy that many are able to overcome even the extraordinary accidental difficulties previously mentioned. Many who have been taught to fear and distrust and hate the Catholic Church from childhood, finally, through reading or association with Catholics, have come to know its true doctrines and its actual ministry and the relation of everything in it to the will of Christ, and have become the happiest converts of all. Many whose sins long kept them away from the Church finally have been driven by remorse and the need of God's pardon into the arms of His Church. Many who have lived for the world and its good things have lived long enough to see their world collapse around them, and then sought refuge in the only place where it could be found, in the Church Christ founded for all.

Indeed, it is so essentially easy to become a Catholic, and so many with a million different backgrounds have done so, that it is sad that so many others fail to overcome the acci-

dental difficulties in their way, or do not bestir themselves into a serious seeking of the truth.

3. *Practical Difficulties.* While it is essentially easy to become a Catholic, this does not mean that it requires no effort. Becoming a Catholic, as thousands of converts will readily testify, is the greatest thing that can possibly happen to one. It transforms one's entire outlook on life; it gives a glorious goal to be striven for at the end of life, and it sets up lesser goals for each day of life.

It could not, in fact, be such a wonderful thing, if it did not require some effort to attain it. Becoming a Catholic is not like an accident that happens to one, nor, a mere emotional experience. It is a fruit of personal human endeavor crowned by the grace of God. All human endeavors involve difficulties proportionate to the end to be attained. Becoming a Catholic marks the highest conceivable end that anyone can ever attain; it means becoming a child of God, a member of Christ's mystical body, a soul being guided safely and securely through life toward heaven by the will of the Son of God. There is work involved in reaching so great a goal.

What To Do

The difficulties that non-Catholics may expect to meet with in the process of becoming Catholics, arise from three sources not concerned with the accidental difficulties previously described. We are considering here the non-Catholic who feels that he should know more than he

does about the Catholic Church, who perhaps has an insistent curiosity about it. Such persons may experience the following natural difficulties in getting closer to the Church:

a. The difficulty of making the first contact with someone who can help him to learn more about the Church.

Many non-Catholics who have a sincere curiosity about the Church, or a leaning toward it, have acquired these through reading Catholic material or conversing with Catholics. But the time comes when they can go no further in their study, without calling on a priest. And for some this can be a terribly difficult thing to do.

Welcome Awaits You

The difficulty arises from a combination of several things. There is always a little fear that whispers: "Maybe all the horrible things they say about the Church and about priests are true." There is another kind of shyness that whispers: "Maybe they don't want to be bothered with me." There is sometimes the mistaken notion that approaching a priest and asking for further information is like diving off a cliff; this is based on the superstition that, by some occult means, the priest will force him to be a Catholic even against his will. None of these difficulties should be permitted to prevail. Going to a priest and asking for further instruction about the Church should be looked upon with the same calmness one would bring to asking a travel agent for information, even though the actual issue involved is the most tremendously

important one in the whole life of man.

b. The difficulty of attending instruction classes and doing some private study and reading.

No priest may accept a non-Catholic into the Catholic Church until he is reasonably convinced that the person knows all the essential teachings of Christ as handed down through His Church, and expresses his intellectual and moral submission to what he has learned. This means that ordinarily a priest must instruct a prospective convert, either alone or in a group. The number of instruction periods required will vary, according to how much the non-Catholic already knows about the teachings of Christ and His Church. Usually anywhere from ten to twenty instruction periods will be needed.

So the non-Catholic has to arrange his schedule to attend the instructions, and to apply his mind to learn what is being taught. This is a difficulty for some, especially for those who thought that all they had to do was to say that they wanted to be Catholic in order to be received at once into the Church.

Instruction

But if such persons will think for a moment, they will understand how indispensable are the instructions. Christ came down into the world both to redeem mankind and to teach mankind. He spent almost three years teaching, and all that He said, both what is recorded in the Gospels and what He entrusted to the apostles, must in some manner be reviewed by those who wish to

become His faithful followers.

From another angle, the necessity of instructions must be clear. Being a true follower of Christ, or a member of the Church He founded, constitutes a way of life—a new way of life, a supernatural way of life, a way that leads to the vision of God in heaven. Surely one who thinks of entering upon this new way must learn what it consists of, what its duties are, what its helps and rewards are. That is what is taught in the instructions given to a prospective convert. He cannot believe rightly in Christ unless he knows what Christ taught; he cannot be obedient to the laws laid down by Christ, directly or through His Church, unless he knows those laws.

The True Road

It is tragic that there are some persons who lean toward the Church, yet permit the difficulty involved in taking instructions to keep them away. The time spent at those instructions and the energy expended on study is a small price to pay for the privilege of finding the one true road to heaven.

c. The difficulty of making the final act of submission to the authority of the Catholic Church as Christ's true Church in the world.

Some converts will have little difficulty in making their final act of submission. Once they have had the doctrines of the Church explained to them, and have seen how perfectly reasonable they are, they cannot wait for the day to arrive when they will be accepted into the Church and accorded all the sublime privileges available to its children.

But some have great difficulty in making their final submission, despite the full recognition of their minds that the Church represents the truth in religion. Cardinal Newman struggled with this difficulty for a number of years before he became the great Catholic that he was. This difficulty may be due to family backgrounds, pressure from friends, or last ditch efforts of the devil to raise a turmoil in the soul.

Whatever the cause, the one sure means of offsetting this difficulty is that of prayer. Indeed, every non-Catholic who begins to think about the Catholic Church, or to take instructions, should be saying daily prayers for God's guidance and grace, even before he has learned enough about the Church to be sure that he wants to become a Catholic. God's grace will come in abundance to the one who prays daily to Him, and will make all difficulties seem

as nothing in the face of what is finally to be gained.

This article may therefore stand as a repetition of the perpetual invitation held out by the Catholic Church to all outside her fold—to come and see whether she does not have what their minds are seeking and their hearts desiring and their souls needing. Especially is it directed to the many thousands who have been living with the thought of learning more about the Church for a long time, but have done nothing about it.

It is also a reminder to Catholics of the many ways in which they may be able to help a non-Catholic friend over some of the difficulties the latter must face. It is easy for a non-Catholic to become a Catholic, if one who already possesses the joy of the true faith helps him at the moments when it *seems* to be so difficult.

Whenever a person is faced with the choice of becoming a Catholic or remaining as he is, personal preferences and mental reservations have all to be put on one side; individual inclination, dispositions, and preferences must give way when that issue has to be decided. Many men have become Catholics from conviction who, humanly speaking, were least disposed to do so, and others, seemingly most disposed, have never taken the step. In such cases outsiders are accustomed to seek an explanation everywhere save where alone it can be found. For all those who have become Catholics from conviction know that they have done so precisely for one motive, namely, the firm persuasion that the Catholic Church is really *the* Church, in which alone there is complete certainty regarding revelation in all its fullness, the plenitude of sacramental grace, and the perfection of the Communion of Saints. Such a persuasion is the only true motive for returning to full communion with the Catholic Church, and with it no question as to the convenience or desirability of one's conversion can be entertained.

The Christian Dilemma—van dePol

HOW TO GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH



A few years ago a young man timidly rang the doorbell of a priest's house. When the door opened, the young man said:

"Father, I am not a Catholic, but I would like to take a course of instructions in the Catholic religion."

"I will be glad to give them to you," said the priest.

"Understand me right, now, Father," continued the young man. "I don't want to become a Catholic. I just want to find out whether all the horrible things my father used to say about the Catholic Church are true."

Needless to say, the priest laughed and arranged the time for the instructions.

Each year more than 100,000 non-Catholic Americans are approaching priests and asking for instructions in the Catholic religion. Their immediate motives may be varied, but in the main they are simply looking for the truth in the most important concern of human life—religion.

It would be unfair to a non-Catholic to accept him into the Catholic Church without giving him a course of instruction, simply because one

cannot be a genuine Catholic without understanding what the Catholic Church teaches and what are the proofs for her teachings. For one who would be a convert to the Catholic faith, there are new truths to be learned and appreciated, new obligations to be assumed, and new practices to be ob-

served.

In the early centuries of Christianity, candidates for Baptism were given a long period of instruction and a longer period of probation. This was due to the fact that these neophytes (as they were called) came out of a pagan, immoral world to seek admittance to the higher, spiritual life offered by Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Today the course of instruction and probation is often considerably shortened, because many converts are largely Catholic in thought and feeling, and already know many Catholic doctrines, before they approach the Church.

A non-Catholic can ask a Catholic friend to take him to a priest and introduce him. If you have no Catholic friend, do not hesitate to go to a priest's house and introduce yourself. You can be sure of a kindly

welcome, for the instruction of converts is one of the favorite tasks of every zealous and apostolic priest.

Most priests use a little book for instruction called the catechism. It contains, in question and answer form, all of the essential information about the Catholic Church: what Catholics believe, what they should live up to, how they pray and worship. In the course of instruction the priest will explain and supplement the questions and answers, and will answer objections and doubts that the converts may raise. The purpose of the instruction is not only that the convert may know all that the Catholic Church teaches, but also that he may be completely convinced that the Catholic Church is the one true Church, which will help him solve life's problems and bring him to God in heaven.

Easy To Understand

One of the satisfying features of Christianity is the fact that the most profound truths of belief and morals can be expressed in words that even a child can understand. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that God, the Source of all truth, is the Author of the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The instructions are usually given privately and individually by the priest, although sometimes, if the candidate wishes, he may join a class, a group of people who are all being instructed at the same time. As a rule, no memorizing is demanded, except for the prayers. The important objective is to understand everything thoroughly. To that end the instructions are made more like

those of a discussion club, in the atmosphere of friendly conversation.

Course Of Instruction

When the non-Catholic approaches the priest, both decide on the most convenient time for the instructions. This will ordinarily be once or twice a week, usually for an hour at a time. The entire course will take from four to six months, depending on the frequency of instruction, the regularity with which the candidate comes, and the knowledge of Catholic truth that he already has. In cases of emergency, the time can be shortened considerably; indeed, when a very sick or dying non-Catholic calls for a priest, only a few minutes are needed to impart the instructions that are essential for baptism and the reception of the other sacraments. If a sick person, thus baptized, recovers from his illness, he should then ask for the more complete and detailed instructions.

As a rule, candidates come to the priest's home for instructions. In the case of a sick or invalid non-Catholic, however, any priest will be happy to give the course of instructions in the individual's home. In case a non-Catholic wishes to become a Catholic before a marriage, he should start instructions at least six months before the date of marriage. Under some conditions this time can be somewhat shortened.

The purpose of taking the instructions is to learn everything about the Catholic Church. If you do not understand a point, or if you think of an objection against some point of teaching, do not hesitate to interrupt the priest and ask about it.

His sole concern is that you learn and be convinced. As a rule, priests welcome questions and objections because they show both interest and sincerity.

Every Catholic Church is a sanctuary of Catholic worship and learning. There are many little accidental acts of Catholic devotion that the priest will not have time to give you even in a thorough course of instructions. To be sure, he will teach you fully about the meaning of the Mass, the sacraments, etc. But there are many little devotional practices that you can learn by observing Catholics and asking questions.

In The Church

When you enter a Catholic Church, do as the others do about you. No one will pay any special attention to you or notice that you are not a Catholic. You can pray there and receive some of the spiritual fruits of the Mass, but, of course, you are not allowed to go to confession or to receive Holy Communion until after you have been baptized or received into the Church.

The priest assumes that all candidates come to him with the purpose of investigating the truth of the Catholic Church. He is happy to help as much as he can, but never does he wish to compel anyone to become a Catholic. On the contrary, no priest is allowed to receive into the Church one who is admittedly not convinced of the truth of the Catholic claims. Whether a person becomes a Catholic or not depends on his own conscience and conviction.

Outside the Catholic Church, there are many weird notions about faith. Some people look upon it as an emotional state in which they merely *feel* close to God. Others seem to confuse faith with superstition; they believe certain things about God and religion, almost as a person would believe in the power of certain charms or mysterious objects, without possessing any rational or intelligent foundation for their belief. Others believe that faith is given to some and withheld from others by a kind of tyrannical decree on the part of God, and that the individual can do nothing about it.

What Is Faith?

For the non-Catholic, the natural approach to faith is to look upon it as *a way of learning truth in religion*.

In ordinary education, there are three ways of learning. One is by seeing or hearing something happen: this is learning by *experience*. Another is by reasoning things out, such as proving that a human being has a spiritual soul: this is learning by *reasoning*. The third and most common way is by reading a reliable book or listening to a reliable teacher: this is learning by *faith*.

Applied to religion, faith is therefore a way of learning God's truths on the word and authority of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Who teaches them through His infallible Church.

Thus it can be seen that, from a human point of view, religious faith is primarily a matter of the intellect and will, not blind emotion or feeling. While Catholics accept all Catholic truths on the word

of Christ Who taught them, they also learn the *why* of everything, because the Catholic religion is most reasonable in all its teachings. Converts are encouraged in their instructions to require proof of every Christian doctrine. Such proof must be available in reason or in the clear teaching of Jesus Christ.

It must be noted, of course, that there is such a thing as supernatural faith, that is, faith capable of meriting the wonderful supernatural favors and rewards that only God can give and that He has prepared for men. Such faith is rightly called a gift of God that is infused into the soul in Baptism. But the preparation for that gift is only properly made by an adult through the use of his reason in coming to an understanding and acceptance of God's words.

Plain Logic

Sometimes people are very logical and reasonable about some things, but seem to lose their logic and even common sense when it comes to religion. Thus they would consider foolish a person who would say that two plus two equal four, and that two plus two also equal five. Yet at the same time they will say that one religion is as good as another or that all religions are equally true, even though they teach contradictory doctrines. God cannot teach contradictory doctrines, and once a person accepts the fact that faith means the reasonable acceptance of what God has actually said, he will know that there can be only one true religion. The same rules concerning truth

apply to religion as to all other branches of science and learning.

The Help Of Prayer

Left to itself, the human intellect is liable to error and is easily affected by feelings and prejudice. For that reason the sincere inquirer for truth in religion should pray earnestly for God's help. That is why a priest usually asks the candidate under instruction to say a prayer each day for God's guidance and for courage to follow his convictions. When a non-Catholic sincerely seeks after the truth and prays, he will not be left without enlightenment and courage.

During the last century a noted clergyman, one of the most brilliant scholars in England, became dissatisfied and began a search for the truth. Eventually he found his way into the Catholic Church and later became the renowned Cardinal John Henry Newman. While he was groping for the truth, he composed and often resorted to this prayer, which can be used by any non-Catholic:

A Cardinal's Prayer

O my God, I confess that *Thou* canst enlighten my darkness. I confess that Thou *alone* canst. I wish my darkness to be enlightened. I do not know whether Thou wilt; but that Thou canst and that I wish, are sufficient reasons for me to ask, what Thou at least hadst not forbidden my asking. I will embrace whatever I at length feel certain is the

truth, if ever I come to be certain. And by Thy grace I will guard against all self-deceit which may lead me to take what nature would have rather than what reason approves.

When a candidate has finished his instructions, he is given an opportunity to tell the priest whether he is convinced of the truth of the Catholic Church and wishes to become one of its members. If he desires to become a Catholic, he is privately received in a ceremony that today is much the same as in the earliest Christian centuries.

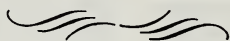
Baptism

If the convert has never before undergone a baptismal ceremony, he is baptized outright and given a Christian name. This twenty-minute service is one of the most beautiful ceremonies in the Church, comprising prayers and acts that symbolize the liberation of the human person from Satan, the purification and ennobling of the soul with sanctifying grace, and the resultant consecration to the care and service of God, climaxed by the pouring of the baptismal water with the words: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit."

If the candidate already has been baptized in a Christian denomination, then the process is slightly different. His baptism may have been valid, and if it can be proved to have been so, the sacrament may not be repeated. Therefore the priest is commanded by the Canon Law of the Church to investigate the previous Baptism insofar as he can. In many cases, however, it is practically impossible to learn whether the previous Baptism was valid or not. In such cases, or whenever there is any doubt at all as to whether a previous Baptism was valid, the convert is required privately to read after the priest a profession of faith, then he is baptized conditionally, and afterwards he makes a confession from the time of his former Baptism. This confession is a safety measure; if the former Baptism was really valid, it is only through the confession that sins committed since the Baptism can be forgiven. Thus no chance is taken of leaving the convert without the full richness of sanctifying grace. He is then ready to receive his first Holy Communion. He is then a member of the one true, holy and apostolic Church established by Christ.

A PRAYER FOR LIGHT



O Holy Spirit of God
Take me as Thy disciple
Guide me
Illuminate me
Sanctify me
Be Thou my God
Be Thou my guide

Whithersoever Thou leadest me
I will go
Whatsoever Thou forbiddest me
I will renounce
And whatsoever Thou commandest me
In Thy strength I will do

Lead me, then
Unto the fullness of Thy truth
Amen

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS — RELIGIOUS INFORMATION BUREAU

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