

The Sanity of Catholicism

By Rev. Albert Power S.J.

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PART I - CATHOLICISM APPEALS TO REASON

Our object in this paper is to show that Catholicism is a sane and sensible religious system. We propose to prove the sanity of Catholicism by showing -

First, that it appeals to the intellect and is founded, not on mere sentiment or conjecture, or blind prejudice, but upon the rock of reason.

Secondly, that it provides suitable and effective means to enable the individual to deal with the problems and difficulties of life; that is, it provides a practical working system whereby each one can, with reasonable diligence, save his soul from the contamination of sin, lead a pure, honest, upright life, and thus secure his eternal salvation.

I assert, then, in the first place, that Catholicism is sane, because it appeals to man's intellect and is founded on reason, and does not shrink from or fear the closest critical or scientific investigation.

First let us consider the act of faith, which lies at the root of Catholicism. An act of faith is, in the Catholic sense, an act of reason, an assent on adequate grounds to certain intellectual propositions. Outsiders constantly misunderstand and frequently misrepresent the Catholic act of faith. Hence, to avoid confusion, I will treat the matter in two ways.

First. - I will try to tell you what faith is not.

Second. - Then I will try to explain more fully what it actually is, and to show you how reasonable it is, and how it benefits a sane man to make acts of faith.

(1) First, then, a Catholic act of faith is not mere credulity or a blind acceptance of the marvellous without reasonable grounds. Non-Catholics often credit Catholics with this kind of thing; they imagine Catholics to be folk gaping openmouthed for any strange story to swallow it down whole.

(2) Nor is faith mere sentimentalism - i.e., accepting things as true because they give you a comfortable feeling. The Catholic, in believing, is not guided by emotion, but by conviction.

(3) Nor, again, does Catholicism appeal, as the Modernists did, to a special sort of instinct whereby one reaches out after the Supernatural - apart from intellectual conviction. Modernists taught that the department of faith was so distinct from that of science that while by faith you believe the Resurrection of Christ to be true, scientifically you might deny its truth; and so with other Christian dogmas. If we Catholics taught that kind of thing we could hardly claim that ours is a sane religious system.

Hence, I repeat, faith is not mere blind superstition, not sentimentalism, not the functioning of a special subconscious faculty, whereby the soul grasps the Divine. No! in the true Catholic sense, faith is conviction. The Catholic says, "I KNOW."

What is Faith?

Now we come to the positive declaration of what faith really is. Religious faith in the reasonable and Catholic sense is an extension or application to the spiritual world of an ordinary intellectual process which all exercise daily, and without the exercise of which our lives as social beings would be impossible. This process consists in assenting to the truth of propositions on the testimony of others. We may acquire knowledge in two ways - either by direct observation (you see a man knocked down by a motor car in the street), or through the testimony of others (you read an account of the accident in the evening paper, or learn it from a friend).

The last intellectual operation, whereby we assent to the truth of facts (which are, perhaps, beyond the reach of our Own observation) because other men testify to their truth, plays an incessant part in our lives. It is in this way most of our knowledge comes to us - on the authority of others. If you reflect on the method whereby people as a rule acquire scientific, geographical, historical, philosophical knowledge, or if you think of the part which books and newspapers play in our lives, you will, I think, admit the truth of what I say. We each of us investigate a very small portion of the earth's surface on which we live - namely, the part traversed by the tiny track of our perambulations through life. All the other knowledge we have of the world - or of the universe - rests on the testimony of others.

Not Unscientific

Now, who will say that such faith, such willingness to accept testimony, is unscientific, or unworthy of a rational being? Who will suggest that it is not based on sound intellectual principles? It may not be easy for you to trace the process whereby you have come to believe without any doubt in the existence of Jupiter's satellites, or of icebergs in the Antarctic, or of Hitler or Mussolini. The evidence has come through many almost imperceptible channels, but is such that it excludes all doubt from your mind. If you analyse the process, it comes to this: You convince yourself by direct examination or reasoning of the reliability of the witness; then you accept his testimony as true. Two things must be clear to you about the witness - (1) That he had ample opportunity to learn the facts; (2) that he is telling the truth. In other words, that he is not deceived himself, nor wants to deceive you. In a court of law, the judge and jury must test these two points: Is the witness truthful? Has he knowledge of the facts? Once they are convinced of these two things, then they accept his evidence, and believe his statements to be true.

To a Catholic believer Faith is just this process. It is not conjecture, nor is it credulity. It means assenting to the truth of certain facts on the evidence of a reliable witness, the witness in this case being God Himself. That the facts (e.g., the Trinity, Incarnation, the Real Presence) are beyond our ken and cannot be directly tested by us is no more a difficulty to our accepting them (when the evidence is sufficient) than my inability to investigate directly the murder of Julius Caesar or the execution of Mary Queen of Scots militates against my belief that these two eminent persons met with violent deaths.

Steps in the Process

The steps that lead to Faith are these: - (1) I assure myself by reasoning and argument that God has actually spoken and communicated knowledge to mankind - that He is a witness to men of truth.

(2) I prove that this knowledge is still available for use, is actually preserved somewhere in the world, is in the keeping of somebody from whom I can obtain it.

(3) I learn the contents of the message, and accept them as God's revelation, on His authority. This last mental act is the formal act of faith. The other two processes, for the carrying out of which we rely on our own intellectual acumen and activity (aided by God's grace), are preparatory, and lead up to the formal act of faith.

Suppose you receive a letter from a friend whose word you trust implicitly. A glance at the handwriting and signature assures you that the letter is actually from this friend. You thereby establish its genuineness and authenticity, and even before you read the letter or know its contents you are assured that your friend has sent you a message, and that you have his message in your hands. This corresponds to the preparatory stages (the *praeambula fidei*, as theologians call them), described above. Then you read the letter and learn certain facts, which you accept as true on the authority of your friend. This corresponds to the formal act of faith.

Renan's Folly

But there is a point to be insisted upon with regard to the kind of evidence on which we rely when giving our assent to the propositions that lead to faith. Renan said he would not accept religious truth unless it were proved to him with the exactness of a mathematical theorem. Now, that is a foolish way of talking. Life would be impossible if men followed out this principle in the ordinary details of life.

Take a few examples: - You sit down daily to take your food without hesitation or misgiving lest perhaps it be poisoned. When a man comes to breakfast he does not demand of his wife a mathematical proof - that she put tea in the pot, not arsenic! How does your wife know it is tea? She trusts the grocer. Does she demand an affidavit to that effect? Yet who will say that we are imprudent or foolish, or that we are risking our lives in drinking a cup of tea without previous scientific investigation into the ingredients of the teapot.

Again, you step into a train or motor car, and place your life at the mercy of an unknown individual - the engine driver or motorman - about whose antecedents and moral character you know nothing. He may be, and usually is, quite a respectable member of society, with a wife and family and other hostages given to fortune, and has no homicidal tendencies that might induce him to increase the pace, dash the train to perdition, and send you to a speedy death. But how do you know all this? Do you think it necessary to accost the engine driver or chauffeur thus: - - "My dear friend, I am about to entrust my life to your care for several hours. Hence, I demand your credentials. Prove to me clearly and scientifically that you are a fit person to take charge of me and my fortunes?"

Think what an average engine driver would reply to such a demand - or, perhaps, better not try to think of what he would say! You see, of course, the absurdity of such an attitude. But now tell me: why do you trust the engine driver? It is really an act of faith. Is it therefore unreasonable? Is it credulity, or superstition, or sentimentalism? Not a bit of it. You know quite well it is an act of faith founded on excellent sensible reasons, which appeal to the intellect, although the chain of argument by which you arrive at the conclusion that you will trust this grimy gentleman in charge of the locomotive is one which you may find it hard to put into words. And I have little doubt that a clever lawyer could make out a very strong case to prove the extreme folly of ever traveling in a train: the engine driver might go mad, or develop a mania for beating records, and try to hit up the pace of a hundred miles an hour, or he might want to commit suicide by jumping off the train, and leave her to dash on without control, and so on.

Danger!

To give you an example: I knew an elderly gentleman who never in his life would allow a barber to shave him. He said it was too dangerous to allow a stranger to hold a razor so temptingly near to one's throat. Yet millions of bearded, sensible men of every race and clime do actually day by day walk into barbers' shops, submit to the razor, and do not think themselves specially brave for doing so. How would you prove mathematically that they were wise in their action?

Now, I apply all this to the Catholic faith, and I say the argument for the existence of Divine Revelation, and hence the argument on which my act of faith rests, is not a mathematical but a moral argument; but none the less good, strong, and powerful, and one which a reasonable man will accept, and in accepting which he gives evidence of his sanity and soundness of judgement; just as the ordinary man shows his common sense by relying on the testimony of others in the transactions of daily life.

Of course, it will be understood that at present I am not dealing with the special supernatural co-operation of God, which is essential to every act of faith; whether it be His co-operation with the intellect by way of illumination to make that faculty capable of eliciting this supernatural act of assent; or His inspiration of the will, which moves the intellect to produce its act. This special influence of God on mind and heart constitutes the "gift" of faith. But at present we are considering the matter merely from the side of the human intellect functioning along the lines proper to it, being moved by apprehension of the truth formally to accept or assent to it.

The Catholic Church, then, builds her system on faith; and faith, I repeat, is an intellectual process, founded on intellectual conviction. It is not mere sentiment, not mere conjecture or guesswork, nor blind acceptance of certain catchwords or airy principles, which prove on investigation to rest on sand.

"The Bible Alone"

Protestantism, on the other hand, is just the opposite of all this. At the Reformation, the "Reformers" called upon the world to reject Catholicism and substitute instead a blind, unreasoning belief in a printed book as the only source and fountain head of Divine Revelation in the world; from which book each man must by private investigation find out what he has to believe. If you demanded (as every sane man has a right to demand), "Why do you want me to accept this book - the Bible - as divine?" there was no reasonable answer forthcoming.

Study Protestant books of theology, old or new, the men who wrote in the sixteenth century or those who wrote in the nineteenth, and you will find either that they never faced that question at all, or else the answer they give is a lame, impotent, unsatisfactory one. For many it comes to this: We know the Bible to be divine, because we feel it to be so when we are reading it.

What a fine criterion this is - the mere subjective impression experienced on reading the Bible! What chance has that system of proof when face to face with modern atheistic principles? Needless to say, it withers away under the fire of attack, so that nowadays Protestants have practically abandoned all belief in the inspiration of the Bible in any true sense.

How Do We Know?

The Catholic position is absolutely different. As a Catholic I know the Bible to be inspired, because the living organ of truth, the Church, tells me so. Just as in the case of human documents, such as books, we know who wrote those books from the external testimony of others that were in a position to know and to testify to the authorship. I know for certain that Charles Dickens wrote

Oliver Twist and Pickwick Papers, because the testimony of his contemporaries assures me of the fact. Of course, once you have a standard to judge by, then internal evidence of style, subject matter, etc., may help you to come to a conclusion as to whether a particular book or writing is or is not the work of a certain author. But internal evidence alone is, as a rule, very uncertain in its findings. Recall the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy, or the endless inconclusive arguments as to the authorship of the Iliad and Odyssey, or of the Letters of Junius, or the Poems of Ossian. But about the authorship of a vast number of writings, ancient and modern, there is no reasonable doubt whatever - e.g., the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and many other Greek writers; of Cicero, Lucretius, Livy, Virgil, Horace, Tacitus, Juvenal, etc. Why? Because we have definite external, as well as internal, testimony to guide us.

Is It Inspired?

When we come to the Bible, the question at issue is: Is God the author of the Bible - i.e., was God responsible for what is contained in the Bible? Did He so control the human writers of the various books - e.g., the Evangelists, that they wrote what God wished them to write, and only that; so that in a true sense the account therein rests on God's authority? And I ask you as a reasonable person to tell me what means have we of answering that question? Who can tell us whether God did really inspire the Scriptures or not? I assert confidently the only reasonable solution is this: God Himself must reveal it. God Himself must teach us about the inspiration of Scripture, else we can know nothing whatever about it. Hence, only a divinely-guided, and therefore infallible, witness can assure us that the Bible is God's word. Hence the Catholic position: "I know the Bible is inspired because the living and divinely-guided organ of truth, the Catholic Church, tells me so'."

That, I say, is a reasonable answer. It is one that appeals to a sane man.

Possibly an objection may occur to you that in offering this solution we are involving ourselves in a circle - proving A by B and B by A. As if John Smith were to write a letter of recommendation about himself, stating that he, John Smith, is a truthful, honest, trustworthy man. Such a letter gives John Smith a good character, but then, on what does it rest? On the trustworthiness of John Smith himself. His authority supports the letter, and the letter is the guarantee for his trustworthiness.

Now, in like manner, I, as a Catholic, believe the Bible is inspired because the Infallible Church says so; but then, I accept the Church as infallible because the Bible says so! This looks like a vicious circle. I prove the Church from the Bible and the Bible from the Church. To show there is no vicious circle it is only necessary to distinguish two aspects of the Bible record.

No Vicious Circle

We can treat the books of the Bible (let us take the Gospels) as ordinary human literature, and use them as a source of historical truth like any other trustworthy documents. From the evidence of those books critically studied we learn the facts of Christ's life: - His teaching, the founding of the Church, and His promises to that Church. In using the Bible thus we are treating the documents as human productions, and there is no question of divine faith as yet, but of the ordinary, natural exercise of the intellect and of the critical faculty of investigation.

To prove the existence of the Church - to learn what her charter is - we appeal to reason. We try to get down to the bedrock of historical facts. Others may be satisfied to get their notion of what the Church ought to be from men like Martin Luther or Henry VIII. We Catholics like to go back and

find out exactly what it is that Christ Himself wanted His Church to be. And surely this is sane, sound common sense.

But having once historically proved the existence and nature of the Church and convinced yourself that the Church was really intended by her Founder to function as an unerring Teacher of revealed truth, you then turn to that Teaching Authority and ask her about the Gospels. She tells you that these Gospels, besides being trustworthy historical narratives, are inspired by God - which gives them a new value in your eyes, and makes them a mine of spiritual knowledge and refreshment for your soul.

Here there is no vicious circle. I prove the Church from the Gospel, regarded as an ordinary historical record, whose authenticity I examine by the light of reason. Whereas the fact about the Bible which I accept on the Church's authority is not the natural trustworthiness of the Bible as an historical document (that I prove from reason), but its divine trustworthiness and fecundity and endless riches, as being written under the inspiration of God Himself.

Private Judgement

A second principle which (as we said above) was loudly proclaimed by the Reformers as the true source and foundation of religion, is the principle of private judgement - i.e., every man must read the Bible to find out for himself what he ought to believe.

Now, how can you call that a sane and reasonable method of discovering truth, which, as a matter of historical fact, has resulted in the creation of a thousand warring sects, all teaching contradictory doctrines, yet each claiming to have discovered the truth by investigation of the Bible? If a man tells me he has invented a peculiarly reliable method for solving mathematical problems, and if I ask a dozen different people to apply the method to the same problem, and each of them produces a different result, and each waves his own particular solution in my face as the only correct and trustworthy answer, what am I to think of the new system? Can I regard it as a safe and reasonable one?

Catholicism, on the other hand, just as it does not demand blind acceptance of the Bible as divine without argument or proof, so neither is it wild or foolish enough to declare that each man must work out his own religious system from the Bible for himself. This would be as reasonable as saying each man must work out his own astronomical system for himself; must be a Copernicus, a Kepler, a Newton, all rolled into one.

No! Catholicism declares that Christ established a living teacher in the world to keep fast hold of God's revelation, and communicate it to successive generations of men.

The Living Teacher

How do sane men act when they wish to have their children educated - i.e., admitted to the great storehouse of human knowledge? They send them to school - that is, to a living teacher. The wisdom of ages has decided that the best way to preserve and propagate truth is to set up, not merely libraries, where knowledge is locked up in cold storage, but schools, colleges, universities, where active living minds congregate to collect, develop and hand on the wisdom of the world. We look to the living teacher to help us all through life.

The mother sowing the first seeds of knowledge in the mind of her child; the schoolmaster drilling pupils in the rudiments of learning; the university professor lecturing to a cultured audience;

Demosthenes kindling the flame of patriotism in the Athenian people; Chatham, Pitt, Fox, Edmund Burke addressing the House of Commons; all the great orators, all the Christian preachers from St. Paul to Lacordaire; all the great tragedians interpreting the world's poetry - what are they all but so many proofs that mankind demands for the effective preservation and propagation of truth, not books, not mere lifeless monuments, speechless symbols and records, but the living mind, the living voice, the living soul, that can kindle in other souls the flame of knowledge blazing within itself?

Knowledge or truth is not a merchandise that can be transferred in bulk as you hoist a bale of goods from a steamer to a railway truck. Truth is a living thing. It must grow in the soul as fruit grows on the tree, and that growth must be promoted by contact of mind with living mind.

God knows all this as well as we do. And when He would teach the world Truth, He sent to it, not merely a book, a scroll of mysterious characters for men to puzzle over and extract the truth from, but He sent a Living Mind, the mastermind of Jesus of Nazareth. He sent a Living Teacher - a Man palpitating with life in its most intense form - a Man with the most comprehensive intellect ever created, with a grandeur of character, an elevation of soul beyond all that men had ever dreamed of: with a marvellous gift of eloquence, and unrivalled power of persuasion; in short, with every glorious quality required to constitute the Perfect Teacher.

Handing on the Truth

How is the work of this Teacher to continue in the world? If Jesus is God, surely the influence of His glorious intellect is not to be ephemeral - is not to pass away after a few years of outward visible presence here on earth. He has come to teach, not one generation, but all generations, for all time to come. That is a wonderful claim - yet Jesus deliberately and solemnly makes that claim.

After He had commanded His disciples to go teach all nations, He makes in one brief pregnant sentence this momentous promise: "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." "I, the Living Teacher, come from God, am with you, teaching My doctrine down all the ages, as men succeed each other upon the stage of time, until the race of man ceases to exist."

And how does Jesus set about having His teaching work continued in the world? Jesus Christ is the sanest man in all history, and His system will be founded on sanity and common sense. It will not be left hanging in the air without a sure foundation. Has He not Himself uttered a warning about the importance of building one's house, not on sand, but on a rock? Hence, we find that He constitutes a Living Organization to perpetuate His doctrines. "Go teach all nations to observe the things I have commanded you." He does not say: "Tell men to study the Bible privately, each for himself, and then find out what to believe." He says: "Go, and teach My doctrine, and I promise to be with you in fulfilling this duty. I will send the Holy Ghost to open your minds to understand the truth, so that you can instruct others. As the Father hath sent Me, so I send you."

The Father had sent Jesus as a Living Teacher to the world; so Jesus sends His Apostles as living teachers to instruct mankind.

The Ethiopian Traveller

When the servant of Queen Candace (as told in Acts viii.) was riding along in his chariot, reading the Prophet Isaias, and Philip was miraculously sent to aid him, although the servant was reading the Bible eagerly to get light about God, still he was unable to interpret the prophet until the living teacher came to instruct him; then the light dawned, he believed and was baptized. That scene was a symbol of Catholicism.

You, too, perhaps, are studying the Bible; or, perhaps, the "Book of Nature," eagerly scanning it to get knowledge of the God that made you. But you grope in the dark until you fall under the spell of the living teaching authority of the Catholic Church, then suddenly the shadows lift and all becomes clear.

An honest enquirer who studies the Gospel record must conclude thus: If this Man, Jesus of Nazareth, be really a divine teacher sent to enlighten the world, and if His mission is to be perpetuated all through history, then there must be still somewhere in the world today a living teaching authority representing Him, speaking for Him, the heir of His promise, and working under the spell of His presence.

I do not say merely there must be disciples of His in the world, or a school of thought representing Him and propagating His views - as, for example, schools of philosophy propagate the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, or Kant. No! We say, if the Gospel record be true, there must still survive in the world a living teaching authority, divinely instituted, founded by Christ Himself, safeguarded against error by Him, enjoying all the privileges involved in the splendid promise: "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."

Where Is It?

And if our unbiased and thoughtful enquirer, rising up from his perusal of the New Testament, looks round the world to discover this Teaching Authority he will not have long to search.

One outstanding body, and one alone, claims to be just this - the Living Organ appointed to impart God's revelation to all mankind. Other Christian sects, while they differ in every imaginable way to doctrine, ceremonies, practices, agree on this one point: of refusing to claim to be a living, authoritative teacher of Divine truth. Whereas the Catholic Church does make the claim, and makes it unhesitatingly, persistently, obstinately, dogmatically, with all the vehemence and intolerance of denial with which a man will assert his own identity. And for the same reason - viz., the Catholic Church has the interior consciousness of her Divine mission, just as a man has the interior consciousness of his own identity - that he is himself, and no one else.

And this claim is made, not by a small sect in some remote corner of Asia or America, but the Catholic Church, which is the most notorious and conspicuous object in the history of the world. The mere fact that the Catholic Church, and she alone, makes this claim, and has always made this claim, to be the living teacher of Christ's truth, is *prima facie* evidence that she is actually what she claims to be - Christ's divinely-appointed mouthpiece - since it is the first essential of one entrusted with such a mission to be conscious of the responsibility.

But, then, on closer investigation, our enquirer will find this Catholic body, which thus boldly makes this claim, claims also the further prerogative of immunity from error when actually fulfilling her mission as teacher of God's truth. And the fact that the Catholic Church makes this claim to infallibility will - if the enquirer is a sane and reasonable man - help to confirm his conviction that in the Catholic Church he has found the object of his search.

For I assert it is simply impossible - it is ludicrous - for a body of men to claim Divine authority to teach God's Revelation without claiming also a divinely guaranteed immunity from error in delivering that teaching.

Why Infallible?

In other words, if Christ instituted an organization expressly to preserve - and propagate His teachings in the world, He must also have made that body infallible in discharging its functions. And if such a body does not claim the privilege of being infallible, then it has no reasonable right to claim to be God's mouthpiece for teaching truth. This principle seems almost self-evident. For see what the denial of it leads to. A Church comes to me and states: "I have Christ's authority to teach His doctrine and to demand from you the submission of faith; still, since I have no guarantee of immunity from error, what I am teaching may perhaps be wrong; yet Christ commands me to teach." Surely that would be a ludicrous and impossible position to adopt.

The very first quality which we demand from a witness who claims credence for his assertions is that he knows the truth and guarantees that he is telling it. The witness who says: "These are the facts, but yet they may well be all wrong," is simply laughed at. Yet, strange to say, it is just this reasonable claim on the part of the Church to know what she is talking about, and to be quite definitely sure that her message is correct, that provokes the fiercest opposition and resentment on the part of the world.

Now, I hope we have made good the first point in the argument for the Sanity of Catholicism - namely, that Catholicism appeals to reason, makes no claim except on reasonable, verifiable grounds, such as will bear the closest scrutiny on the part of intelligent, unbiased enquirers.

Next we will deal with the Sanity of Catholicism as shown in the means it provides for the spiritual welfare of the individual soul.

PART II - CATHOLICISM AND THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL

To be very practical in one's methods is a sign of sanity and common sense. Building castles in the air is an occupation which empty-headed, impractical dreamers are fond of indulging in. To entertain foolish schemes and talk of accomplishing them when adequate means are completely wanting is the mark of an unbalanced mind.

What I wish to insist on is that Catholicism does not merely set before us a high ideal, does not appeal merely to the imagination and intellect, as do philosophy, art, literature; does not merely speculate in a graceful, captivating way about life and immortality; but that it takes practical, efficacious steps and supplies definite means to enable men to attain the noble ends it proposes to them.

And first let me draw your attention to what I may call the individualism of the Catholic Church, the extraordinary care she lavishes on each individual soul entrusted to her. This care is the logical outcome of Catholicism - of the doctrine so insistently taught by its Founder, Jesus Christ, about the supreme value of each single human soul.

The Secret of the Universe

The immortal thinking soul it is that explains all the rest of the visible universe. The whole radiant world of creatures is in God's design, but the setting for the incomparable jewel of the soul. The material universe is exquisitely, intoxicatingly beautiful - so beautiful that for love of it men forget its Maker. The fascination of the creature blinds them to the infinite perfection of the Creator. When you come to think of it, what is the meaning of such expressions: "Nature is very beautiful: the midnight sky is majestic, solemn, imposing?" In using such expressions we are simply describing the emotions produced in the human soul by the contemplation of those creatures of God. To what purpose would light exist were there no eye to utilize it? What end would the harmony and grandeur

of the material universe serve if there were no human soul to appreciate it, and give expression to feelings of admiration by praise?

The thinking soul is the eye of the universe to contemplate its beauty, the tongue of the universe to proclaim the glory of Him who made it, the heart of the universe to love Him in return for His benefits.

The soul, then, is the priceless jewel hidden away in this material existence, and to save that jewel from eternal loss is the whole aim and object of the Catholic Church. Hence the minute care she bestows on each one of her members from the first moment of the child's appearance on the bustling stage of life until as an old man he breathes his last sigh and closes his eyes in death, the Catholic Church is busy about his soul. Her Sacraments await him at every stage of his journey to God. Through the gate of Baptism the child becomes a Catholic - receives the freedom of the city of God - becomes a citizen of the Church. By the Sacrament of Confirmation the citizen is enlisted as a soldier to fight in defence of the glorious liberty of the children of God. But citizen, as well as soldier, needs food to support his strength and nourish the new and wonderful life communicated in these Sacraments; so the Church spreads for him the Banquet of the Body of Christ.

These three Sacraments - Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist - are intended for all, and are to give positive supernatural life to the soul and to nourish that life. But, alas! the soldier may fall wounded on the battlefield, the weapons of the enemy may prevail, he may be lying in danger of death. Every army must have its ambulance corps, its surgeons and remedies; and so the Church hastens with the Sacrament of Penance to help her wounded sons - binds up their hurts, and tenderly nurses them back to life.

Marriage

But then another important crisis may come, and usually does come, when the life of one is to be merged into the life of another, and two souls, through the gate of marriage, enter into a new world of duties and responsibilities, two lives that have hitherto flowed as separate streams are united as one river flowing to the ocean of eternity. Here, too, the Church is waiting, and her Sacrament is ready to bless the union of man and wife - to speed them on their way and supply the special spiritual help they need for the new existence on which they have entered.

Or perhaps a man, instead of being attracted by an earthly bride, dreams rather of walking in the footsteps of Christ - whose Bride was the Church of living souls - and would consecrate his life as a priest to the work of saving mankind. If so, the Church consecrates him for her work with the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Comfort in Death

Then there is a final turning in the road which awaits us all - a turning that will open up strange new vistas - when we shall need very special help. That is Death. And for her dying children the Catholic Church is specially solicitous. She is ever on guard, sentry like, at that dread portal, and with her Last Anointing strengthens the soul for its passage to eternity.

During the Great War, a wonderful impression was created on outsiders by the tender, practical, heroic way in which Catholic priests ministered to the spiritual wants of wounded and dying soldiers on the battlefields and in the hospitals.

Men were struck by the contrast between the attitude and method of the Catholic priest and the methods (or rather want of method) of the clergy of other denominations. And what was it made the difference? Just this - the Catholic priest came with the Catholic Sacraments in his hands: he came to whisper words of Absolution for sin, to feed the soul of the dying man with the Eucharist, to anoint him with the consecrated oil of Extreme Unction, he came with the gifts of pardon, of spiritual nourishment and of strength. Why was the priest - the official representative of Catholicism-- able to do this? Because Catholicism is a sane, practical system which has at its disposal definite means of helping souls in their spiritual needs. The priest kneeling beside the dying soldier on the battlefields of France or Belgium did his work well just because he represented the Universal Church. He spoke to the dying man, not with the lips of a private individual, but with the voice of Christ's Organ for teaching Truth - he spoke with the lips of Christ Himself.

The Catholic Way

Now, I would ask you to consider more in detail the Catholic system of providing for the spiritual welfare of the individual soul, and to note the definite, careful, sensible way in which the Church ministers to the wants of her children. She knows well that to minister to man's spiritual wants effectively she must supply three things: -

Light to satisfy and guide his intellect, Peace and consolation to satisfy his heart, Strength and endurance to support his will.

If the Catholic Church cannot supply the necessary nutriment for those three faculties of man, then it is incomplete and ineffective and unjustified in its claims. We shall see that it is just those three good things of Truth, Peace and Strength that this great practical religion offers to her children - these constitute her merchandise, in which she traffics and which she invites all to come and receive at her hands.

And first, with regard to teaching Truth. Alone of all religious bodies in the world the Catholic Church claims to have a divine mandate to teach revealed Truth. And the practical result of that conviction is the extraordinary interest she takes in the education of her children. Other religious bodies may calmly acquiesce in the control of schools by secular authority, the Catholic Church - never! Catholics may be compelled to pay taxes to support secular schools, but that will not prevent them from imposing fresh taxes on themselves to build Catholic schools where Catholic children may receive proper instruction in the truths of religion, and may be brought up in a thoroughly Catholic atmosphere.

She knows, of course, that thought rules the world. As a man thinks, so he lives. History is only the working out in practice of the ideas that men conceive - just as a building is the result of the architect's plan. The decay of a nation, like the moral ruin of an individual, is the result of the pursuit of wrong ideas. To regenerate a man the first thing is to get at his thoughts.

Sow a thought, and reap an act. Sow an act, and reap a habit. Sow a habit, and reap a destiny.

Built on a Rock

And so this great mother of souls shoulders the responsibility of teaching these truths, and in her schools, no less than in her churches, keeps ever instilling the divinely-taught lessons which she has been commissioned to teach. She holds the key of Christ's granaries (as He Himself expressed it), and is ever solicitous to deal out in due time just measures of wheat to feed hungry souls. Look up at this strong castle, built by Christ to stand four-square to all the storms of impiety and unbelief - to

breast unswervingly the flood of paganism which Christ foresaw would beat pitilessly against that great tower. Listen to the Master Builder's words: "Upon a rock I will build My Church: and all the fury of hell shall not prevail to tear down those strong walls - because they are - by Me - founded upon a rock."

Look out across the world today, and see how literally that prophecy is fulfilled. Apart from Catholicism, the lamentable decay of religious belief is bringing about, with startling rapidity, the state of things foreseen and foretold by Newman and others, when the world will be divided into two hostile camps: the forces of Atheism (of unbelief and denial of God) on one side, the adherents of Catholicism on the other.

To illustrate this, let me give you a few details about one small but important portion of the English-speaking world - Great Britain. According to recent statistics the population of Great Britain (i.e., England and Scotland) is about 40 millions. Of these, about four millions are Catholics. Of the remaining 36 millions it is calculated that not more than ten millions attend a place of Christian worship, or can be called in any sense adherents of Christianity. Making allowance for about 150,000 Jews and leaving a wide margin for other sects, there remains a mass of some 25 millions of people of whom the only thing we can say is that they are, to all intents and purposes, pagans.

Surrounded by this surging sea of unbelief is it any wonder that the Catholic Church is so terribly insistent on the duty of safeguarding her children's faith by securing their education in a Catholic atmosphere? And surely this insistence is as much a mark of her sanity and robust common sense as it is for men in time of plague or pestilence to adopt vigorous means to secure themselves against contagion.

A Practical System

In order to appreciate better the reasonableness of Catholicism, I will now ask you to consider the wonderful method in which the Catholic Church brings home to the heart and mind and conscience to each of her children the great fundamental truths which lie at the basis of all true happiness, whether for time or eternity.

These truths are: - First, the existence of a personal God, our Creator and Master. Secondly, the freedom and responsibility of the will. Thirdly, the immortality of the human soul.

Atheism, Materialism, Agnosticism mean the denial or calling in question of these three truths, and hence the undermining of the foundation on which true happiness in this world and in the next must rest.

Catholicism proclaims these truths - champions them inexorably in the face of a protesting world; but she does more than this - she adopts measures to bring them home in a living, practical way to the individual soul.

The Existence of God

"God exists - He is your Creator - you are bound to worship Him; and therefore I require you to hear Mass every Sunday in order to fulfill this duty."

So speaks the Church. Every Sunday all your life long, from the age of seven years until you die (unless prevented by good reasons), you must come to church to fulfill the duty of adoring your

Maker. You see how in this simple, practical way the fundamental duty of adoring God is brought home to the individual Catholic.

To the Protestant, going to church is a matter of choice - the Catholic Church insists upon this weekly act of homage as a grave duty.

And then think of the infinite difference between what awaits the Catholic when he goes to Mass and the service which the non-Catholic has to look forward to when he goes to church. The Catholic goes in order to offer up with the priest the Sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood. To the Catholic, entering his church means entering the audience chamber of the great King, where Jesus Christ is actually present. Hence the atmosphere of reverent silence, of prayer, of adoration which normally prevails during the time of Mass and especially at the moment of Consecration.

Even the most careless Catholic must be affected by fulfilling this weekly duty of worship. But in the case of the Catholic who hears Mass devoutly, who prays earnestly and fervently during the Holy Sacrifice, a very wonderful influence is exercised; his soul is fed with heavenly food to sustain and strengthen him against the inroads of the deadly, insidious, poisonous germs of infidelity and immorality with which the air all round him is so heavily laden.

Freedom and Responsibility

The second great fundamental truth insistently taught by Catholicism is the freedom of the will and the moral responsibility of each individual for his own acts, and hence the nature and consequences of sin. But again Catholicism is not satisfied with merely telling you that you have free will, and are responsible to God for your actions and words and thoughts; but it says to you, "You must go to Confession. You must tell your sins, and make an act of contrition, and get absolution from the priest."

Now, I want you to think a little about the sane and practical nature of this great institution of the Sacrament of Penance, or Confession. The Church is here to help us in our difficulties. What is the supreme difficulty which each child of Adam has to contend with on the road of life? What is the great obstacle that bars his path to God, to overcome which he is in sad need of supernatural assistance? History and our own experience tell us; it is sin. The weakness of our nature, the lower, earthward tendency in us, drag us away from God and the higher things of the spirit. What do we require to lift us up?

First and foremost, to be cleansed from sin, to be assured of pardon for past sin; and then a strengthening of the spiritual element within us to enable us to control passion and avoid sin for the future.

These things are provided for in the Catholic system by the Sacrament of Penance.

This Sacrament has two aspects, the one painful and humiliating, the other comforting, strengthening, elevating.

Confession of one's sins to a priest is often a painful and penitential ordeal, which we naturally shrink from; but then the assurance of pardon given by the priest as God's representative brings peace and joy to the soul which only those can understand who have actually felt it.

Confession is sometimes a stumbling-block in the way of would-be converts. To kneel down and say, "I have sinned - I have violated God's law in this or that particular way," is hurtful to our pride. The difficulty men find in telling their sins is strong testimony to the sense of shame for having

committed sin which is deeply rooted in the human heart. We have offended God, the Giver of the law; we know it, and yet we can hardly bring ourselves to admit the fact to a fellow creature.

And this painful duty of Confession is, of all others, the most salutary to make us rise up from sin and to deter us from committing new sins. It is like the surgeon's knife; it is sharp, it cuts deep; but it pains only to heal: it wounds to give relief.

The Great Disaster

When in the sixteenth century certain innovators set about "reforming" the Church, they very quickly got rid of this duty of confessing one's sins, and in doing so cut off one of the most efficacious of all means for cleansing and healing the soul. Now the world is beginning to realize the disaster which the Reformation was, and is clamouring to get back Confession, or something equivalent to it. Men realize that the heart overcharged with guilt and misery needs for its relief a sympathetic ear into which it can pour its tale of sorrow, shame and weakness. The mere unburdening itself to one who understands and sympathizes is the greatest of human consolations. But suppose the listener to be not only a trustworthy friend, but a divinely appointed comforter, with supernatural powers to heal and soothe the bruised soul, one who holds the place of Christ Himself, who, speaking in Christ's name and with His authority, assures the sinner that his sins are washed away, and that he is reconciled to God - so that he can lift his head and look his God in the face again - if an institution like that were possible, surely we would call it a blessed thing indeed? Well, that is exactly what the Catholic Sacrament of Penance is. You go to a priest and tell your sins; it hurts just as it hurts to drink bitter medicine or submit to the lancet; but then the blessed words of absolution are spoken, *Ego te absolvo*, and you rise up from your knees a new man, with the fire of courage burning in your heart - the light of hope kindled in your eye - ready to face life again.

Suicide

You may have read something of the dreadful statistics of suicide in the civilized world in more modern times, and especially in Europe since the Reformation. It is well known that suicide has been much more common among Protestants than in Catholic communities. (See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Suicide," Vol. XXVI, page 50 (11th. ed.). In England and Wales, e.g., during the years 1861-1906, the average annual number of suicides has gone on steadily increasing from 65 to 100 for every million of living inhabitants.

May we not reasonably assert that this terrible increase in acts of self-destruction and despair is to a large extent the effect of the abolition of the Catholic confessional? Confession is the safety-valve for the overcharged soul which is being dragged down to despair by the worries of life. The soul needs to hear amid the storm of life's troubles the comforting voice of Christ saying, "Be of good heart, it is I; be not afraid" - as the frightened disciples heard it ring across the storm-tossed waters of Galilee. Well, it is from the Catholic priest in the Sacrament of Penance each individual soul can hear those words addressed to itself personally by Christ's representative.

Atheism, Agnosticism, Paganism look out on life with eyes of despair. The pessimism of unbelief finds its only relief, and its only logical issue, in self-destruction.

The Sacrament of Hope

Confession is the Sacrament of Hope; it is to set up a strong barrier against the flood-tide of despair; and I ask you, is not that religious system a sane, a reasonable one which insistently reminds the

world that Christ came as a Messenger of Hope, and that it is because He wants us to hope that He bids us confess our sins and hear the words of pardon from the lips of His priest: "Whose sins YOU shall forgive," Christ said to His priests, "they ARE forgiven them - by God in Heaven."

Hope is sanity; despair is madness and folly; and just because Catholicism is the religion of hope, it is also the religion of sanity and common sense.

By this Sacrament of Confession, then, and by obliging us to go regularly to Confession, the Catholic Church in a practical manner keeps her children mindful of their responsibility to God as free agents, and the necessity of repentance and atonement where sin has been committed.

Immortality

There remains the third great fundamental truth of Catholicism (besides the existence of God and free will), viz., the immortality of the soul, and the soul's immortal destiny, to possess and enjoy God for ever in Heaven.

Here, again, let us see what practical means the Catholic Church adopts in order to bring home this doctrine daily and hourly to the minds and hearts of her children. The whole organization, method and system of Catholicism turn upon this doctrine of immortality - it is the pivot around which all the rest revolves. Hence, every word and action, every ceremony and doctrine, of the Catholic Church presuppose, or call attention to, our immortal destiny. Her eyes are fixed, not on this world, but on the next. But amid all her doctrines, Sacraments and practices there is one supreme doctrine that brings us into immediate contact with this fundamental principle of immortality - brings us into constant relationship with that existence after death to which we are all hastening, and that is the doctrine of Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist.

The Real Presence

That doctrine includes the following points: -

1. When the bread and wine have been consecrated at Mass, then Jesus Christ, the living Man, is truly and substantially present just as He was on Easter Sunday when He appeared to Mary Magdalen at the tomb, or to the disciples in the supper-room.
2. This belief in the real living Presence of Jesus presupposes the Death and Resurrection of Christ - i.e., it presupposes His new existence after death in a glorified, risen body. It is with the risen Christ we are brought into contact in Holy Communion.

Why did Christ rise from the dead? Was it not to solve for us the riddle of death? All down the ages men had been asking the question: What is death? And none could answer. They saw generation after generation of mankind passing through the dark gates of death, but none ever returned to say what had befallen them. Jesus the Man God came and faced death. He, too, passed through those dread portals; but He did what no other man had ever done: He came back from the tomb to tell us of the life beyond the grave. Jesus came back as the herald of immortality - to assure us in His own living Person what our lot is to be when death claims us as it claimed Him.

In Holy Communion you come to receive and converse with the risen Christ; and He comes to refresh in your soul, too, the belief in your immortal destiny - He comes to strengthen and cheer you in the great struggle for immortal life which is occupying us here below.

Sane with the Sanity of Christ

See how sane and practical Catholicism is - sane and practical, because its thoughts are the thoughts of Christ Himself. The Catholic Church does not merely speculate, as the philosophers did, on the immortality of the soul; she is not satisfied with merely preaching the doctrine: she does something more wonderful, more piercing and miraculous; she cries out, "Come and taste immortal life in this Sacrament. Here is the King of Immortality come in person to prepare you for your eternal destiny."

Immortality means the possession of God for ever, and we get a foretaste and a pledge of that in receiving Christ under the sacramental veils.

But this subject of the Eucharist and the part it plays in Catholic life is too vast and complicated to be dealt with fully here, and I must be content with merely indicating the marvellous method adopted by the Catholic Church (under instructions from her Founder) to make her children realize the value of their immortal souls.

And here we pause in our argument. I hope I have said enough (although I have merely touched upon the fringe of the subject) to show that the sanity of Catholicism is manifested in the practical way she provides for the spiritual welfare of her children.
