

# Vagaries Of The Devout

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## PROLOGUE.

Prologues used to precede entertainments. The author trusts that the following pages may prove to be entertaining and so entitled to the old-fashioned ritual of a pretty speech imploring the kind favor of the reader. Please take it as spoken.

In this case some preliminary words are for another reason most desirable. The origin of this production should be known, that allowances may be made for certain peculiarities of style. What you are about to consume — may it be with avidity — is the result of the dishing up of five conferences delivered a year or two ago. (If these last words are at all reminiscent of the grace before dinner, we may remind ourselves that Charles Lamb has laid it down — and who shall deny it? — that it is equally fitting to say grace before reading as grace before meal.)

That this brochure is a "rechauffe" (a reheating of an old meal) of several separate talks is sure to entail a suggestion of disjointedness and also a more colloquial form of composition than what is expected in a serious literary performance. The writer hugs the idea that the lack of unity is less real than apparent; and is confident that the clear logical mind of the reader will supply for this defect. He is sanguine enough to believe that the second characteristic — chattiness — may lend a charm.

1. This little treatise deals with some of the salient eccentricities of pious people of either sex. It considers them under six heads, partly for the sake of orderliness, partly with a view to adding some positive matter, which it is hoped may prove helpful and instructive.

A vagary — the writer prefers the accent on the second syllable — has been defined as "a departure or straying from the ordinary and regular course of conduct or propriety." Another definition is: "a frolic, or prank of a freakish nature." This is scarcely applicable to our present subject. The words "devotee" and "devotees" carry with them the suggestion that devotedness to the divine service and worship is cultivated without due regard for proportion, at the risk of exposing religion to ridicule or contempt. The Oxford Dictionary quotes the following jingle, which provides an extreme instance of such extravagance: "A devotee sat in a tree until the birds made a nest in his hair." A "devotess" would have had more sense than that! No bird would have made a nest in her hair!

It is worth remarking that the words "devoto femineo sexu" which occur in that lovely liturgical invocation which commences "Sancta Maria, succurre miseris" applies strictly only to that section that is bound by the vows of religion, and does not intend to declare that all female human beings are devout. ('Sancta Maria, succurre miseris' "Holy Mary, succor and help those in need, the poor", 'devoto femineo sexu' 'intercede for devout religious of the female sex'.) Fortunately many females are devout, and that on quite sensible lines.

In this pamphlet, our chief concern is with the public behavior of Catholics in church. When we are performing our devotions alone, we are naturally allowed greater freedom for self-expression.

Congregational services are somewhat of the nature of a parade, and so those who take part in them may be expected to conform in the main to the usual conventions and to avoid behaving in any way that might distract the other worshippers. Whilst not wishing in the least to introduce into the sacred precincts the discipline of the drill-yard, we may reasonably advocate a considerable element of uniformity. One who is in such matters a pronounced "non-conformist" may easily become a real nuisance: the same is equally true of those who require a degree of conformity irksome to some characters. A fair compromise must be established between those who stand for freedom and those who prefer order. If only there is an atmosphere charged with naturalness and simplicity, restraint and unselfishness, the desired result is sure to be attained. In the main local customs should be respected.

The gentle art of being a good neighbor ought, one would think, to be more perfectly practiced in a church than in a place of amusement; for when we go to the theatre, we do not make any special profession of the love of God or man, and are thrown together without there being any particular bond of sympathy. In all public gatherings, affectation, or any form of self-assertion is sure to be resented.

In a German or French Cathedral where we help ourselves to a chair and plant it down where there is lot of free space, opportunities for practicing self-sacrifice and consideration for the feelings of others are not so plentiful: the pew-system is rich in these.

Two fairly substantial human beings, by flopping down respectively at either end of a bench, may make it morally impossible for six weak-minded fellow mortals to find a place. If this were done on a large scale the seating capacity of churches would be severely impaired. The difficulty created in this manner has been known to give rise to scenes that might easily be mistaken for scuffles. Sometimes one may see the younger brethren walking the plank with a view to getting over such obstructions. Whilst envying them their agility and freedom from human respect, one is tempted to think that the obstacle has richly deserved a passing reminder not to do it again! But surely, if we feel bound in honor not to surrender our position of advantage, ordinary politeness would dictate that we should rise and, disguising our resentment, allow the "intruder" to enter. It is said, with what measure of truth it is difficult to determine, that those who are most in arrears with their bench-rent are the most retentive of their rights real or imaginary. Such persons are, forsooth, only too fully entitled to be styled "seat-holders".

By sitting back suddenly when the majority are kneeling, a thoughtless person, devout or otherwise, may inflict appreciable inconvenience, if not injury, on the man or woman who has the misfortune to be immediately behind. This is mentioned by way of warning, not of suggestion.

In the "sanctuary" we have, unless the rubrics are notoriously neglected, an example of almost ideal politeness. We have a right to expect that there should be, in the nave and the aisles, some faithful reflection, in due moderation, of the good manners of the officiating clergy. If only, where it is needed, a reform could be brought about on the lines suggested, a big step would have been taken towards attracting outsiders. Non-Catholics would soon learn that they are welcome in our churches and that a homelike and orderly spirit reigns amongst us. It is strange if they would not wish to become full members of a family so well conducted.

Once upon a time, some fifty years ago, a convert clergyman, who had been unfortunate in the social reception given to him on his conversion, is reported to have said sometimes to his children on leaving church: "Come along, my dears; let us make haste to escape from your co-religionists."

Probably he was partly to blame; but no doubt, greater charity on the part of the "born" Catholics would have saved the situation.

2. What makes the Catholic church so different from the Protestant churches is the Blessed Sacrament. A single consecrated particle in the Tabernacle changes the whole character of the church: the Master is at home. This means that the children are also at home. This "at-homeness" can be quite well reconciled with reverence. The inward reverence cannot be excessive but the external forms of reverence must be duly regulated. The rubrics decide points of ecclesiastical etiquette for the sacred ministers; approved custom is the chief guide for the laity.

The Council of Trent has a fine passage which we may quote without apology: "The Eucharist is not the less adored that it may be received; for we believe that the same God is present in It of Whom the Eternal Father, bringing Him into the world, said: let all the angels adore Him; that God Whom the Magi adored, falling down before Him; Who finally was adored by the Apostles in Galilee, as the Scripture testifies." (Session 13, chapter 5).

Our knowledge of the Early Christians is limited, but we do know that they had deep reverence for the sacred Species. Tertullian (born A.D. 160) tells us: "We are full of anxiety lest anything of our chalice or of our Bread should fall to the ground." They had in those days of persecution a more guarded way of speaking of such mysteries; circumstances imposed this "discipline of secrecy." The simplicity of ceremonial may also have been a protest against the elaborate rites of the pagans and against the undue importance attached to externals, which was typical of the Pharisees. The general expectation of the speedy coming of Christ and the end of the world contributed to the same effect. The Eucharistic activity of Our Lord was considered only in the Sacrifice and in Holy Communion. Owing to arrested growth, this is still the outlook of the Orthodox Churches. Once conditions became normal in the West, devotion to the Blessed Sacrament followed the law of gradual development. It was the denial of the Real Presence by Berengarius in the 11th century (born at Tours A.D. 998) which called forth by way of counterblast a more pronounced type of public homage. We are indebted for our present Elevation (in place of the little Elevation just before the 'Pater Noster' – the 'Our Father') to this movement. It is only necessary to mention Corpus Christi, Saint Juliana, the Archdeacon of Liege who became Pope Urban I, and Saint Thomas Aquinas, to stimulate the most sluggish imagination. The 13th and 14th centuries witnessed a splendid advance. Before the end of the 16th century, Benediction in its present form was firmly established.

It is one of the standing miracles of grace that, whereas the external impressiveness of the Blessed Sacrament — a frail wafer — is so slight, the respect shown throughout the Church is for the most part so creditable to all concerned. One might well have feared that familiarity would have bred contempt: this has not been the case: on the contrary, the standard of behavior towards the Hidden God has been and is very high. It would not be in the interest of true devotion to pitch it too high. We are men, not angels, and the sacraments are intended by the Giver for finite, imperfect men. The Latin tag that tells us this is worth inserting: "Sacramenta propter homines. (The sacraments are for human beings.)" An old parish priest, whom no one could suspect of lack of reverence, was wont to say: "It will not do to make a nuisance of the Blessed Sacrament." If signs of respect were exacted exceeding the capacity of the average Catholic, harm would soon result. A good rule is to put full value into what we do, but to shun all singularities. The double genuflection before the Blessed Sacrament exposed need not become a prostration.

It happened to me recently when entering a church, to find the passage blocked by a group of people kneeling in the open space because the priest was giving Communion. Would it not have been better to have gone quietly to the nearest available bench? The sacrosanct character of the "gangway" is seldom appreciated by those who have not had experience of life on board a small craft in the years of childhood. That is a precious education. A profitable meditation could be made on the points of resemblance between a church and a ship. The fact that the central passage is called 'nave' from the Latin word "navis" (ship) must not be omitted. That the Apostles, including Saint Paul, were used to life afloat is another telling point. Personally, I am inclined to recommend, whilst on the topic of gangways, that those awaiting their turn to kneel at the altar-rails, should stand and not kneel. Standing, the regular attitude for prayer and worship in the early days, is a thoroughly reverent posture.

It is when standing or seated that one should bow the head at the 'Gloria Patri, (Glory be to the Father') not when kneeling, which is already a posture of special reverence: we have almost lost sight of this fact and come to feel that we have no business in church unless we are on our marrow-bones. The effect of the service — Vespers (Evening Prayer) or Compline (Night Prayer) — is considerably enhanced where it is the general practice to bow for the Gloria Patri. A similar mark of good Catholic breeding is to make a bold sign of the cross at the starting of the Magnificat, (My soul, it Magnifies the Lord) Nunc dimittis (Now, O Lord, you may dismiss) and Benedictus (Blessed be the Lord). This honor is due to these three canticles in as much as they are the three psalms of the New Testament, recorded in the Gospels themselves.

When you receive Communion and there are none to follow, remain at the altar-rails until the ciborium is put back and the tabernacle door is closed: if it is a case of communion outside Mass, it is most correct to wait for the blessing which is given at the end of the little service.

It would never do to close this section of "Vagaries" without making a remark or two on the actual receiving of the sacred Host. Perhaps the best form of advice is as follows: imagine yourself to be the priest and ask yourself how you would like the communicant to behave. You would most certainly wish him to open his mouth and put his tongue in such a position that the sacred Particle may easily and safely be placed on it; but, alas, there are usually one or two who make this almost impossible. They seem to expect our Lord to effect a miraculous entrance.

3. We may pass on now to the perennial debate as to the relative merits of liturgical or non-liturgical devotions. By liturgy, we mean the official, universal, fixed, canonical forms of Catholic worship. These standard forms of prayer are all contained in the Missal, Breviary or Ritual (the book used for the administration of the sacraments). It is worth noticing en passant that the word "leitourgos" in classical Greek stood for a public (municipal) officer. The first syllable is derived from "laos" (people). As "laity" owes its origin to the same source, it would seem that lay-folk ought by rights to be liturgical! Anyone interested in such points of scholarship would do well to look up in the Greek the following texts showing the New Testament use of the word: Luke 1:23, Acts 13:2, Hebrews 8:6.

It evidently took centuries to develop the glorious liturgy, which we have inherited. We are of course debtors both to the Temple of Jerusalem and to the Synagogue.

Monastic churches played a splendid part in popularizing the daily round of praise and instruction contained in the Breviary. Westminster Cathedral worthily carries on that grand tradition. In smaller

churches, we have at any rate two fragments sometimes available — Vespers (Evening Prayer) and Compline (Night Prayer).

It would be foolish to speak disrespectfully of other forms of devotion approved by competent authority. Under some conditions, these are indispensable.

But our preference will always be for that venerable liturgy which is at home in every latitude and longitude which has flourished throughout the ages.

The Rosary holds an honorable position in between. In the Western Church, it has gained universal acceptance. It serves as a golden bridge between vocal and mental prayer. It has proved itself invaluable for private recitation. How many a tedious journey or solitary tramp has been cheered by this best of comrades. For such purposes and in such predicaments there is nothing to replace the beads. But if it is to be a success as a public service, it demands, like every other public service, a moderate allowance of ceremonial accompaniment. If it is gone through in a way, which provides hostile critics with an excuse for calling it mechanical, slovenly, gabbled, it is not given a fair chance. Sometimes one is tempted to think it is being used as a stopgap to keep things going whilst the congregation gradually assembles for the sermon. Any exercise, to be at all worthy of God and of our Blessed Lady, needs some thinking out, some rehearsing and something of the nature — pardon the word — of staging. In some parishes, it is the custom to stand for the second and fourth decade. This is an excellent practice, relieving monotony and adding dignity; and oddly enough, there seems a certain appropriateness to the mystery in the upright position.

And now it is high time that we pinned another vagary to the counter. Is it not strange and truly "vagarious" that so many devout human beings make no use whatever of four beads invariably provided on our rosaries? To call this an anomaly would be little, if any, exaggeration. Yes; it is deeply to be regretted that this little prelude or preface, in honor of the Unity and Trinity of God, should so often be omitted. Such things seem to bear out the old law that asserts that all men are stupid, the so-called clever ones being only a few degrees less so!

In the great liturgy of the Mass of Saint Pius V, it is a crime against liturgy to kneel down at the "Verbum caro factum est" ('the Word was made flesh') in the last gospel and not to rise again. If it were not done thoughtlessly, it would be an act of laziness and irreverence deserving the censure and suggesting that the culprits would soon be clamoring for sofas in church.

We all know that Latin is our liturgical language and are rightly proud that it is so. We aim at acquiring at least a smattering of church Latin and rejoice when circumstances allow us to take our part in answering responses. To "Dominus vobiscum" (The Lord be with you) we instinctively reply "et cum spiritu tuo" (and with your spirit); to "Adjutorium nostrum in nomine Domini," (Our Help is in the name of the Lord), we can say "qui fecit coelum, et terram," (who made heaven and earth), {this is from the opening Psalm said at the foot of the altar}; and we can, at Benediction, even give the right answer to "Panem de coelo praestitisti eis." (You gave them Bread from heaven.)

"Deus ad adiuvandum me festina" (God {or Domine, Lord} make haste to help me) is also a household word. Might not some of these lovely Latin phrases serve as most helpful ejaculations? And if at times you would like Greek as a change, use the Kyrie eleison (Lord have mercy) as it is said at Mass in honor of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.

In the controversy between "liturgiphiles" and "liturgiphobes" (lovers and dislikers of liturgy) there are excesses — vagaries — on either side. As in other matters of an even more controversial nature,

a reasonable compromise should be effected. A sense of humor is the best safeguard against taking oneself and one's hobby too seriously. This also applies to the burning question of Gregorian music.

4. Statues and pictures offer a fair field in which to exercise devotional eccentricities. For that reason, it will be wise, before attempting to give any examples, to remind the reader of a few historical facts.

Before the coming of Christ, there were obvious reasons for severely restricting the use of anything that might prove an occasion for the sin of idolatry, which was of course a very real danger. The Incarnation changed all that: for it is true to say of that mystery, that by it and in it the Word of God became a living statue. His followers could now be trusted to make good use of images. But owing to that law of universal stupidity — second only to the law of gravity and perhaps connected with it! — prejudices firmly established died slowly. The Jews who became Christians, — and, thank God, there were many excellent Jewish Christians, — took a long time before they became reconciled to statues or even pictures. (Some of us are tempted to wish that Mr. Jacob Epstein might regard himself as bound by the law forbidding the representation of the human form!)

When Mohammedans came into existence, they reinforced the Jews in protesting against the worship of images. Owing to these and other causes there started a long and fierce campaign in which the opposing sides were known as Image-breakers and Image-lovers—Iconoclasts and Iconophiles. The struggle raged chiefly in the lands that paid allegiance to Constantinople. The Emperor and the Army were opposed by the monks and the lower classes.

Saint John Damascene and Saint Theodore the Studite were the leaders of the monks, the champions of popular devotion. These things took place in the eighth and ninth centuries. It was the last Council held before the disunion of Christendom (Nicaea II, A.D. 787) that finally formulated the Catholic doctrine on the subject. Empresses were in favor of Icons; and it was the Empress Theodora who in A.D. 842 established the Feast of Orthodoxy. But the victory in the East was only partial; it abandoned all claim to the use of statues. On this point, we must rejoice that we are "Latins" and that the Popes, especially Saint Gregory III, had no truck with half measures.

Probably it is quite true that some of the image-worshippers "Iconolaters" had indulged in superstitious forms of devotion. One reads for instance of a favorite icon being held over the baby in the font and made to act as its god-parent. It is also recorded that some would scrape a minute quantity of paint from the portrait of their patron and swallow it in his honor. Such doings, even though they may be ingeniously defended scarcely tend towards edification.

Surrounded as we are by a large majority of Protestants, Rationalists and unbelievers, it is important that what may be described as the side-shows of religion should not seem to be preferred to what is central, the trimmings to the substance of the fabric. A Russian who was observed, on going into church, to pray before several pictures of saints, defended himself by explaining that he did so not feeling worthy to go straight to Our Lord: Saint George, Saint Demetrius, Saint Michael and, more than all put together, the Theotokos — Mother of God — would escort him gradually into the presence of the great King. This is a fine rebuff to the vulgarity of the Protestant backwoods-man who taunts the Catholic with neglecting the One Mediator. But, for all that, we would not approve of anyone spending the bulk of the Mass-time kneeling before a statue of Saint Anthony. An instinct guides us to avoid singularities, which may easily, being misunderstood, do harm to the cause of religion. By putting forward prominently that which we hold in common with all Christians, we may succeed in leading outsiders nearer to the distinctive doctrines and practices, which we rightly

hold dear. It is such tactfulness and strategy, which, in a famous chapter dealing with obstacles to the conversion of England, Cardinal Manning, using the game of dominoes as an illustration, recommends so highly.

5. The subject of statues suggests a word on pet saints. The soundness and sensibleness of devotion to the saints is evident to all Catholics and to most other Christians: Some of us stick to the old stagers whose names figure in the litany of the saints. Others are chiefly interested in the recently canonized who are for the time being in the limelight. There can be no doubt that these new recruits frequently shower favors on their clients in great profusion. As long as this preference for the saint in fashion is not carried too far, it would appear to be a true instinct drawing us nearer to God. But it should not lead to the complete neglect of the grand old veterans of the days of yore. Catholics who belong to all the ages and to whom all the ages belong, should not be fickle or new-fangled. The fashions of Eternity are fixed.

Should you be invited to christen a new church, it is safest to choose a "titular" from the old guard: there is the possibility that in fifty years the new saint may have suffered almost total eclipse.

Early in this twentieth century, the Bishop of Cremona, Geremia Bonomelli, published a series of pastorals that caused no small stir, dealing with defects and abuses (*defecti e abusi*) in the practice of external religion. It may be read in English (Burns & Oates). It is the work of an Italian conscious of the existence of an element of superstition in the religious life of his fellow country-folk, especially in the South. He knows Protestants at a respectful distance and is perhaps unduly impressed by the spirituality of their religion. The result is a volume, which, as it stands, is somewhat unbalanced. He blames Italians for showing more respect to statues and relics borne in procession than to the Blessed Sacrament and, very happily, quotes the telling words of Thomas a Kempis: "Many run to visit the relics of saints, admire their works, contemplate with wonder their sanctuaries, and kiss their bones wrapped in silken cloths and covered with gold: and, behold, here on the altar You are present, my God, the Holy of Holies, the Creator of all men, the Lord of the angels."

The good Bishop refers to Saint Expeditus — San Spedito — a saint of dubious authenticity who attained to widespread popularity for a time as patron of punctuality and the associated virtues. He recounts a gruesome story of pious folk swallowing small pictures of Our Lady of Good Counsel, one a day for a hundred days. After touching on a number of odd forms of devotion, he may be excused for likening them to "fungus growth": they would certainly seem to be symptoms of an unwholesome condition of soul.

He cites an interesting episode: some eccentric pieties practiced in a convent were once brought into a discussion in the unsympathetic atmosphere of the French Chamber of Deputies. To the anti-clerical, this was the choicest entertainment. It does not follow, however, that the "vagaries" that provided merriment for free-thinking politicians were necessarily ridiculous or reprehensible. It may be all right to bury medals in ground which we are anxious to acquire for an orphanage; it may be a sound Catholic instinct to put Saint Joseph out in the rain without an umbrella! But those who do such things should make sure that they are well instructed in Christian doctrine. And if we are aiming at solid virtue, we will not exaggerate the importance of temporal favors. The hierarchical order must be observed; the things which have direct reference to God must come first; the others following in a descending scale.

No devotion should be adopted unless it is likely to intensify in our soul the genuine love of God and of our neighbor; for instance we should not overload ourselves with pious paraphernalia. "The holy man of Tours" (the Venerable Leon Papin Dupont) wore every possible scapular and medal; this may have been a special vocation. In selecting, liberty of spirit must be preserved. {The Church canonizes people for their holiness, not for their eccentricities or vagaries.}

It is not fair to argue, because Saint Paul might have disliked some modern devotions had he been suddenly confronted with them, that therefore they are to be mistrusted. Saint Paul was a Christian of his day; we are Christians of ours: in substantials we agree, in accidentals we may differ. If Saint Paul had been shown a statue of the Sacred Heart, it would have startled him; and in spite of his intense devotion to Christ crucified, the crucifix would have also given him a shock.

Monsignor Le Camus is quoted by the Bishop of Cremona as finding fault with the image of the Child Jesus of Prague. On questions of good taste and artistic value, opinions differ widely and sometimes fiercely; but Monsignor Le Camus's quarrel with Prague goes a little deeper. Saint Paul is again invoked; but it is not possible to ascertain what his considered judgment would have been: and even Saint Peter would probably not have claimed infallibility had he been consulted on such a point whilst on earth. If the Prague statue promotes piety in the average Catholic, that is a strong point in its favor.

This distinguished French prelate writes: "The general weakness of spirit in the Church arises in part from the variableness which a number of new things produce in the religious feelings — new things which excite a passing enthusiasm and create a real peril to the spiritual health, as sweet foods substituted for meat may promote momentarily an appetite for them, but afterwards change the elements of the body itself." This passage no doubt deserves careful consideration. He continues on the next page — 115 — to ask whether it is thinkable that the Apostles, or men of the caliber of Ambrose, Cyprian or Francis Xavier, would have gone about the world laden with medals, images and religious emblems of all kinds. There lurks in this rhetorical question the same fallacy that has been already exposed. If such "weak elements" — not to be called "weeds" (page 125) — can serve as bait to catch fish for the Master, good luck to them!

An extraordinarily interesting and edifying life has recently been translated from the Spanish, of Francesco Tarin, S.J. [He was declared Venerable in 1987.] This most ardent giver of missions, a man whose self-immolation is almost incredible, closed his marvelous career in 1910. During his 22 years of missionizing, he distributed fabulous quantities of pious objects — miraculous medals, badges, leaflets, et cetera. Several convents were kept busy to satisfy his enormous demands. He knew the Spanish peasant through and through and found that such things helped. Perhaps the text "Unless you become as little children..." may be meditated on with advantage in this connection.

The memory of Joseph II of Austria (1741-1790) has recently been revived by S. K. Padover. This biography is entitled "The revolutionary Emperor." Frederick of Prussia spoke of him as: "my brother the sacristan." This was said sarcastically, because Joseph during his reign of ten years interfered constantly in Church affairs. The poor man, soured by domestic sorrows, plunged feverishly into the work of social reform. His mother, Maria Teresa, had overdosed him with the externals of religion. He may be roughly analyzed as one third Catholic, one third Protestant and one third rationalist. Politically there was also a trichotomy: autocrat, bureaucrat, democrat. These triplets fought within him and there were no psychoanalysts in Vienna, or elsewhere, at that time to help him in the task of sublimation and integration!



There were many monasteries and the standard in most not very high. The total of monks was soon reduced from sixty-five thousand to twenty-seven thousand. The secular clergy were treated as minor state officials. "Being what he was, he never bothered to clarify his attitude towards God and the Cosmos; theology was not his sphere." He wanted to keep religion, but reduced almost to a skeleton. For anyone to attack religion such as he approved was to him a sign of insanity: "a nobleman who used a censer to beat a priest was sent for three years to an asylum. A few hundred Bohemians took to calling themselves Deists. He sentenced them to twenty-four lashes, not for being Deists, but for claiming to be something without knowing what they meant by it."

"Like Calvin, Joseph ordered that unnecessary church decorations — relics, votive tablets, statuary and lamps — should be thrown out... He forbade clothes on the statue of Mary; stopped the distribution of amulets, the touching of pictures, rose wreaths, kissing of relics, and 'other such things'. The length and number of services were rigorously regulated; likewise the usage of the altar, church music and litanies. Pilgrimages and processions were cut down to once a year in connection with the feast of Corpus Christi." The quotations are from the author already mentioned, who is by no means Catholic in his sympathies. The surviving monks were ordered to stop their choir singing. The "Nine Days Prayer" (Novena) was not to be allowed in Prague. Coffins were to be made of soft wood and to have flat tops, popularly designated "nose-squeezers." When later he ordered "burial sacks", there was almost a revolution. He gave in: "If they are so stupid, let them bury themselves as they like." He had a sense of grim humor!

This was the monarch with whom Pius VI (1775-1799) had to deal before taking on Napoleon. Being to some extent a snob, he, and still more his horrible Chancellor Kaunitz, despised the Pope who though a handsome man, was not an aristocrat. Joseph died childless and friendless before reaching his fiftieth year. Nearly all his schemes failed; but the Church in Austria still suffers as the result of his reforming mania. It is not wise to pluck up the wheat with the cockle. Those who might be styled "Anti-Vagarians" may be terribly dangerous people. Most of us have a strain of Iconoclasm in our blood; self-discipline is needed to keep it in control.

6. Before writing Amen at the end of this booklet, it is fitting to say a word or two about the Amenites and the Anti-Amenites. Of the latter, there are two types, negative and positive: the negative are never heard to say that word and cannot imagine why anyone should ever want to say it; it is no concern of theirs. In their heart of hearts, they dislike it. A non-Catholic bishop, referring to choirs is reported to have said with conviction: "Those Amens bore me to extinction." The "positives" show their disapproval of the use of this Hebrew word in active ways ; if a neighbor is addicted to the saying of it in a tone of voice at all pronounced, the positive 'anti' will make it abundantly evident that he regards it as bad form, as something "which is not done." His influence is all against such demonstrations.

Against these and all their allies stands out the stalwart Amenite. He understands the meaning and significance of the word, he knows something of its history and mystery; he loves and relishes it using it alone and in public according to the best traditions of the Catholic Church.

A long treatise might be composed on this little word of two syllables. Few words have so long and glorious a lineage. We can still hear the shouting of the Israelite (Deuteronomy 27) as they accept with hearty Amens the promulgation of the Decalogue. Isaiah gives Amen as a title to God Himself — Elohe Amen (Isaiah 65:16). [‘The God of truth and faithfulness] Saint John the Evangelist, a kindred spirit, speaks of "the Amen, the faithful and true witness." (Apocalypse 3:14). It was a pet

word with Our Blessed Lord: "Amen, amen I say to you..." It lingered on His sacred tongue, it savored so sweetly of eternity.

Saint Paul refers to it in that splendid passage (2 Corinth 1:17 20), in which he plays so deftly with the phrases "it is" and "it is not". In the ordinary, unregenerate Human life, there is a constant see-sawing between "it is" and "it is not", a shilly-shally, a chopping and changing, an inconsistency, a compromise with principle, that saps the foundations of truth. But with the Christian "yes" is "yes" and "no" is "no": each rings true, and affirmation is preferred to denial... "Jesus Christ was not 'it is and it is not', but 'it is' was in Him. For all the promises of God are in Him, 'it is'; therefore also by him, Amen to God, unto our glory."

Saint Justin the Martyr (born about A.D. 100) tells us that at the meetings of the Christians all the people cry "Amen." Saint Jerome (born A.D. 340) testifies that when the congregation in Rome answered "Amen" in chorus, those outside might mistake the sound for a thunderstorm. Not much fear of such false alarms nowadays!

Saint Ambrose (born about A.D. 340) bequeaths to us in a casual sentence an interesting piece of information: as the priest gave Holy Communion, he said Corpus Domini (the Body of the Lord) and the recipient answered Amen. How many would do it now? [Since Vatican II. The priest says, 'The Body of Christ'; the communicant answers, 'Amen'.]

Hebrew scholars trace the word to the root of the verb meaning to support. So it stands for firmness, solidity, truth: "Yes" "it is so", "it is the truth", "we affirm it too"; "we would die for it, because it is true and God is the truth." It is the war-cry of the liege-men and liege-women of God. The Pro-Gods rally to it all over the world.

And what is the truth about Amen-saying amongst our Catholics? Each will be able to supply one answer to this query. If he has put in an Amen too many or too loud, is it not a thousand times better than one too few or too feeble?

Saint Hugh of Lincoln whispered Amens in his sleep; they sounded like the echoes of his dreams. That valiant athlete of Christ believed in the promises his Master had made; "Amen; they will be fulfilled;" he accepted the teaching of Christ; "Amen, it is the truth and in it there is no error." In his slumber, like another Saint Joseph, he bowed to the will of God; "Amen; may it be accomplished."

We can scarcely do better than and with a slightly paraphrased version from a chapter in Father Pierre Charles. "Prayer for all Times": "Amen comes to us from afar — from the Patriarchs of old. With it, we put our zeal to our treaties with God, we ratify them. The little server says it for us at Mass: it is almost a pity we have not to say it for ourselves — a condescension to our weakness. [Since Vatican II, we SHOULD be saying it!] During the day we will say Amen to the train that has started too soon or arrived too late; to the rain, to the sun — a loyal and strong Amen. A holy Amen causes all resistance to melt away; with it, we may move the mountains.

"The priest in the act of baptizing leaves out the Amen after the sign of the Cross. We may explain the omission as signifying that the neophyte is to supply it in his life. Life should aim at being one unbroken Amen, until at last, when we can no longer utter it with our lips, the bystanders supply it for us; 'Requiescat in pace... Amen.' (May he Rest In Peace... Amen.) By then, please God, we shall have heard the great Amen, the Amen of the massed choirs of the Angels." AMEN.

EPILOGUE.

On re-reading a paper such as this, one is sure to regret some omissions. The critics are invited to supply them for a possible, not probable, future edition.

It is indispensable to the proper understanding of the subject to have a clear idea of what constitutes superstition. Put in short, that is superstitious which cannot be reasonably explained. When you ask someone why he considers spilling salt unlucky, he is at a loss how to give an answer that does not seem silly; whereas the well-instructed Catholic can tell you why he wears a scapular in terms that are, presupposing the supernatural, rational and scientific. Whenever there is an adequate connection between cause and effect, there is no superstition strictly so-called.

It might easily be thought that too much space has been devoted to Joseph II. But he is such a brilliant example of the Vagaries of the Un-devout, that we have felt justified in upsetting the balance of our booklet for the sake of providing an offset to those vagaries with which we are primarily concerned.

The Catholic religion, essentially luxuriant and exuberant, supplies all manner of devotions and pious objects for her children of all ages, young and old, of all countries. The man who attempts to standardize its devotional life, under the delusion of restoring it to primitive simplicity, is hacking at the roots of a fertile and prolific tropical tree. A disgruntled friar played a leading part in the sad drama, which inflicted Protestantism on Europe. The harm that was done by that blight becomes more evident with the lapse of time. Saint Thomas More, who had far more culture and far deeper religious convictions, in spite of all the abuses of which he was well aware, gave his life in loyalty to the old allegiance. Those who desire to prune the tree, of which mention has just been made, should do so in loyal co-operation with men of the type of (Saint John) Fisher and (Saint Thomas) More and beware of the evil company of those afflicted with the reforming complex.

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