

CHATS WITH YOUNG MEN

THE YOUNG MAN WHO HAS A VOCATION

By Rev. W. D. O'Brien, in Extension Magazine

In speaking of a vocation to the priesthood, we are not unmindful that every calling, even the lowliest, has opportunity for hallowed service and a beautiful life. Every one who does his duty according to the will of God, in whatever calling it may be, is pleasing to God. A good man should find rest and joy in his work, think of it as noble and worthy, and put his best efforts into it. Not every man should be a statesman, a lawyer, a physician, a journalist or a priest; some must be carpenters, some masons, some painters. Each calling has its own work, and every human occupation its own glory.

In the world to-day there seems to be an impression that the priesthood is not an attractive vocation. Among our own people a different impression prevails. The idea that the number of young men who choose the priesthood as their life-work is growing smaller is a fallacy. On the contrary they are increasing in number every year. When we consider the growth of the priesthood, both regular and secular, in the last twenty-five years in America, we must admit that it has kept pace with the great growth of the Church itself. There is room to-day, especially in the poorer dioceses of America, for hundreds of other young men willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause of Christ. They must remember, however, that the life of the missionary in the western or southern part of America is not at all on a par with the life of the priest in our larger centers of population. The American people have no conception of the sufferings, hardships and sacrifices that the greater portion of the Catholic priesthood must bear. Yet, without, the Catholic mother still prays, with intense longing, that some day one of her sons may stand at the altar of God. Worldly Catholic mothers do not so much desire that their boys become priests. Indeed, there are some Catholic parents who even seek to dissuade their sons from following this vocation.

The priesthood does not offer much in the way of money. The commercial and financial world has greater attractions and more compelling allurements. All other callings present greater opportunities for more brilliant careers. Our Catholic young men of to-day have the examples of many of their predecessors who have become great statesmen, great jurists, great physicians and great scientists. Compared to these splendid careers the vocation to the priesthood suffers greatly. The priest is not likely to become rich. The average salary of the priests in this country is about \$500 a year. In the missionary dioceses very few receive even this amount. All this means plain and close living, not to mention obscurity and sometimes even want.

In spite of these comparisons and conditions, a vocation to the priesthood has its attractions which draws irresistibly upon the hearts of worthy young men. The priest is an ambassador of Christ. As such he is accepted by all the Catholic people. The priest brings to the people the good news of the love of God, and calls them to accept that love. He is the minister of the Sacraments of the Church, the dispenser of her Mysteries, and a mediator between God and man. Can any earthly honor be as high, or any human calling as sacred?

The priest is the representative of Christ in the saving of the world. Holy Scripture tells us of what Christ did for the communities in which He lived, for the home in which He was received, for the individuals into whose lives He came. What Christ was to the people who enjoyed His ministrations, Christ's priests to-day should be to the men and women to whom they minister.

Lamartine has drawn a magnificent picture of the priest. This is the beginning of it: "There is a man in every parish who, having no family, belongs to a family that is world-wide; who is called in as a witness, a counsellor and an actor in all the most important affairs of civil life. No one comes into the world or goes hence without his ministrations. He takes the child from the arms of his mother and parts with him only at the grave. He blesses and consecrates the cradle, the bridal-chamber, the bed of death and the bier. He is one whom innocent children grow to love, to venerate and to reverence; whom even those who know him not salute as Father; at whose feet Christians fall down and lay bare the inmost thoughts of their souls and weep their most sacred tears. He is one whose mission is to console the afflicted and soften the pains of the body and soul; who is an intermediary between the affluent and the indigent; to whose door come alike the rich and the poor—the rich to give alms in secret, and the poor to receive them without blushing. He belongs to no social class, because he belongs equally to all—to the lower by his poverty and not unfrequently by his humble birth; to the upper by his culture and his knowledge, and by the elevated sentiments which a religion, itself all charity, inspires and imposes. He is one, in fine, who knows all, has a right to speak unreservedly, and whose speech, inspired from on high, falls on the minds and hearts of all with the authority of one who is divinely sent, and with the constraining

power of one who has an unclouded faith. Such is the priest, than whom no one has a greater opportunity for good or power for evil, accordingly as he fulfills or fails to recognize his transcendent mission among men."

The opportunities of the young men with vocations to the priesthood are many in our time. Any of the religious communities are willing to receive properly qualified subjects, even though they have little or nothing to pay for their training. All our larger dioceses have preparatory seminaries into which any young man with vocation will be accepted and educated without charge. If the diocese for which he studies is not able to support him, missionary societies are willing to take up the burden.

No young man who hears the call of Christ sounding in his soul is worthy of the Master if he does not follow in His steps. At least he should make the attempt and allow superior minds to judge of his worthiness. Our people do great injury to young men who study for the priesthood and fall in the attempt. Instead of looking upon them as "spoiled priests," they should rather give them the credit of having aspired to a higher life, even though they failed in the attempt. Only one who has passed through the ordeal knows the courage and the strength of character it takes to be able to say, "I have no vocation; I am going out again into the world!"

On the contrary, the grace of a true vocation is almost its own reward. Nature into full fruition in the priesthood, it floods and penetrates the soul which possesses it. A true vocation marks every faculty with its seal; keeps the soul in communion with God, and, while others exist in the world of man and nature, the religious soul is centered in the Infinite. It feels God's presence everywhere; everywhere it looks to and calls on God, meditates on and adores Him.

Of all the forms in which human nature can be clothed, the priesthood is no doubt the most perfect, for it gathers together all the powers of man into the highest harmony, concentrating them on the sublimest object which the intelligence, the will, and the power of action can attain. Since truth, goodness, and other sacred ideals have God for the centre of perfection, to live with God and for God is to live in eternal truth, eternal goodness, and absolute beauty.

What an almost divine consolation it is for the good priest to find that the outward and visible expression of his priestly faculties employs and includes all others; the genius of thought, to teach men in the highest truths of God, destiny and life; the genius of action to command and discipline conscience, the genius of art, to impart the divine idea, in word or ritual, so as to charm mankind through the senses. In the Name of God, whose ambassador he is declared to be, a priest does not discuss, but affirms; he speaks as a master, "as one sent," and exercises a sort of fascination over the multitudes. Priests, from their very character, have the secret of inspiring Faith in those who are worthy of it. They flow through the centuries, like rivers of light, irrigating and nourishing thousands of generations through which they take their course. Verily do they seem to form the wake of Christ across the waves of the human ocean.

"Command follow me" is the sweetest command that ever fell from the lips of Jesus! If the divine call finds echo in your heart; if your intention is to serve God and save souls; if you are willing to spend laborious years in acquiring the necessary knowledge; if your life is without stain, hearken to the gentle voice of Christ, saying: "Come after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men."

OUR BOYS AND GIRLS

IDEALS

"Aim high," is a motto that every young lad should ever keep before his eyes, for if his standard is low he will never make himself felt as a power later on, and he will glide through life taking things as they come and go down to his grave with the realization that he has accomplished nothing.

Boys will have pleasures. All right. It is their nature to enjoy life whilst young and the man who would deny them their rightful enjoyment would be doing them a great injustice. But despite the fact that they are joy loving creatures they can in some measure prepare themselves when they are young, for their future career.

It is an acknowledged fact that the strongest part of a house is its foundation. No matter how beautiful a structure may appear, yet if it possesses a weak foundation it will totter and its beauty will be no more. We all know that the "boy is the father of the man." Now if in youth the boy is contented with ill-prepared lessons, if he spends his time in the amusements of the movies instead of at home, if his companions are far from ideal, what kind of a man will he be later on in life? It certainly would be a very unusual thing to see this lad when matured into manhood as a leading business man, or as a lawyer, or fulfilling the holy functions of the priesthood. Just as the young tree must be trained to grow straight, so also must the young boy be watched and trained if he would wish to do something great in life.

Instead of making such a hue and cry about health and its preservation, the teachers of today would do well to admonish their pupils to take some high standard and constantly aim at it. Their pupils may not reach it but they will at least get somewhere near it and thus avoid being a burden to themselves and their parents.

Julius Caesar had an ideal and he accomplished it. Napoleon Bonaparte had a high ideal, in his own estimation, and he reached it. True, every boy is not a Caesar or a Napoleon, but God has allotted to him a certain degree of talent and if he sets his ideal in accordance with his God given gifts he will assuredly attain it.

The fixing of an ideal will give a boy something definite to aim at and also make his school days mean something more than mere drudgery and routine. His studies will mean more to him and he will carefully avoid everything that will prove detrimental to his ideal. If he decides one day to become a lawyer he will so regulate his conduct that he will always be ending towards this particular profession. To be a good lawyer he knows dishonesty will be his undoing so he must play fair in his games and treat everybody justly; to be a successful lawyer he knows he must possess a ready fund of knowledge and this he can obtain, not by spending his evenings at the movies, but by conscientiously endeavoring to understand the lessons assigned by his teacher.

Indeed it will be hard always to live up to the high ideal one has set for oneself and oftentimes it will grow dim and meaningless but with a little good will and perseverance the boy must again seek for it and apply all his powers to the successful attainment of it. "Nothing worth while is easily attained," is a somewhat trite saying, but it is applicable as regards the attaining of an ideal. The boy who sets his ideal high and then thinks he can reach it by taking things easy will be badly disappointed and see it gradually slip from his grasp. After setting the ideal, the one and only great way of attaining it, is by constant and patient work for it. That is the way it was obtained in the past and that is the only way it can be obtained at present.—Selected.

MGR. BENSON'S LETTER ON INDULGENCES

WRITTEN TO PROTESTANT INQUIRER AFTER TRUTH

My dear Sir,—I am glad that you think that I have made the doctrine of penance appear to you, at any rate, rather reasonable. I quite understand, however, that you will need thought and consideration before you can say more.

You have put your finger exactly on the point when you raise the question of indulgences, and you very properly say that you do not understand how it can be that if absolution really forgives sin, anything like an indulgence is required.

Now, you will pardon me for saying in return that I gather you have not quite grasped what it is that Catholics mean by an "indulgence." I am very thankful, however, that obviously you do not think it to be a "leave to commit sin," or any nonsense of that kind. However, perhaps, the best thing for me to do is to explain clearly why an indulgence is as reasonable and inevitable, granted the main premises of Christianity as common sense, as are the other Catholic doctrines. But I shall have to begin some way off from the subject.

Imagine, if you please, a drunkard of fifty years' standing who repents with his whole heart and amends his life. Such a man as this is at once, according to both Catholic and Protestant doctrine, forgiven by the power of the Precious Blood. Yet, it is a matter of experience, is it not, that such a man still has to pay the penalty of his sins—not the eternal penalty, of course, that is forgiven him as soon as his guilt is washed away in the Blood of the Lamb—but the "temporal" penalties; he does not, that is to say, immediately regain his health or the money he has wasted, or the friends he has alienated. Here, then, is a great principle—the effect that God does not always remit the punishment of the sin when He remits the guilt. (You remember how it was after David's sin, "The Lord hath put away thy sin," said Nathan the priest to the King, as soon as David had made his confession; "nevertheless, the child that is born to thee shall surely die.")

Now, we Catholics believe, as do you Protestants also, that God's attitude to us is a reasonable and consistent attitude. We may conclude then, that since in physical sins, such as drunkenness or lust or excess, there are temporal penalties, usually physical, so, too, it is in other sins—spiritual sins, for instance—such as pride or resentment or anger or envy—even though we cannot always see what the penalties are.

Now, imagine that our drunkard only repents on his deathbed, two minutes before he dies. What about those temporal penalties which he still owes to God? Is he going to escape them altogether? Is it fair that he should not have to pay anything, whereas other men who have perhaps repented long ago have still their shattered health and their poverty and their loneliness? Could we believe in God's justice if that were so?

We Catholics, then, hold that if those penalties are not paid in this world they are in the next. That this drunkard of ours, or, let us say, a proud, spiteful, revengeful man who has always had the best of everything, and who has repented only just in time—that man like this, even though his guilt has been washed away, still must pay their "temporal" debts to God; and we call the place where the transaction is completed, Purgatory.

Now, please do not be alarmed at the word. The word is nothing. Put out of your mind all the false things you have heard said about that doctrine. Face the fact. Is not the idea perfectly reasonable and perfectly consistent both with Christianity and common sense? Unless you hold something of the kind—(call it what you like)—I do not see how you are to meet the facts. Where is the flaw in anything I have said? However, dare you do not see any difficulty in it, after all; many Protestants are beginning to hold the idea, though they are still terrified of the name.

Very well, then. Here is the debt of temporal pains which is, obviously, not remitted always when the guilt is remitted. Now, is there any means by which we can ourselves help to pay the debt even in this world and not wait until we are driven to it? If we can, we call that act by which we pay that debt the winning of an indulgence, though that is not all that the word implies. Let us go back to our sinner to make it clear. Imagine some great sinner of that kind—let us say an utterly selfish and mean man, who, up to the age of sixty, has never given God a thought, who has never helped his neighbor, who has never loved any one. Well, at the age of sixty he repents fervently and sincerely.

Now all he is bound to do is to repent and refrain from sin for the future. Both you and I believe that if he does that his soul is washed in the Precious Blood and is saved. But supposing his repentance is exceptionally fervent; suppose that, hating the thought of his past selfishness and loving God as he never thought God could be loved, he determined to do some really heroic action—to sell his estates, let us say, as our Lord told the young man to do in the gospel—to give all away to the poor, and to go and live in some slum, as a poor man, and devote himself entirely to his neighbors? Would not that be magnificent? Would not that be magnificent because he need not do it, he can save his soul without it; magnificent because it would be such an act of generous love and sorrow. Do you not think, then, that God would think it magnificent, too? Do you not see, then, that by his voluntary poverty and sufferings he would be anticipating, so to say, the temporal penalties he owes to God for his sixty years of selfishness, that he would, of his own free love and action, be embracing his purgatory in this life? This heroism of his has nothing to do with the forgiveness of his guilt; that has been done already by the Precious Blood of Christ; but he has chosen to pay the heroism, (or some of them) that are still due.

That, then, is the main idea of an "indulgence." He is winning a sort of personal "indulgence" by acts of love which he is not actually bound to perform. We see, then, plainly, that although whatever we do for God we are still "unprofitable" servants, yet for all that there are what we may call "extra good deeds" which God does not absolutely demand of us as conditions of our salvation. I am not bound, for instance, to go out and preach to the heathen till I die, or to become a friar, or to fast every day—although all those things might be good and generous. We may add to those obviously good actions a number of others, too. I am not bound to recite particular prayers, (beyond the "office" I have to say as a priest), or to say my rosary every day, or to go out and visit the holy places in Palestine, or to build churches. Yet all those things would be good and pleasing to God if I did them out of love for Him and was already "in grace"—that is, in a state of salvation. (Of course, I cannot cheat God by doing these things and yet persisting in grave sin.)

Very well, then, the Catholic Church has drawn up a list of such good deeds, which no one is bound to do but which will certainly please God if they are done, in a proper spirit, and tells us that, if being already in grace, we will do those things generously and freely, she guarantees that they will count before God—just as the heroism of the selfish man who repents and goes to live in a slum, counts—as serving the purpose of paying the temporal penalties which we still owe to God for our forgiven sins. Is not that reasonable? Would not you treat your own child in the same way? If he had disobediently broken a window, let us say, and then been honestly sorry for it, and told you so. Well, of course, you would very likely make him pay for the window. But suppose he came to you with a little present he had bought out of his pocket money from pure love of you, would not you probably let him off from paying for the window? Of course, you would, if you really loved him. Well, then, that child would have "won an indulgence" from you. No present would do if you knew he was not sorry in his heart; but if he were, and you knew it and had forgiven him, surely the little gift would touch you, and you would do exactly as he has said. Well, God is our Father, and we are His children.

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But that is not quite all. In the case of most of us, nothing that we could do in the way of heroism could ever pay off the frightful debt of temporal penalties that we still owe to God. It is not a mere pane of glass we have broken; we have smashed nearly all the precious things within our reach. One of us has insulted the Holy Ghost by refusing to follow His leading; another has lost his purity; another has led some other soul into deadly sin. How in the world can our little gifts to God, our tiny acts of generosity, ever pay off the ruin we have caused? We are very sorry of course, and our Father has forgiven us, but what about the paying?

All God's children, however, are not so outrageously bad as we have been. There are the martyrs, for instance, who have shed their blood for Christ; the virgins who have lived spotlessly, the noble missionaries, the saints of all ages and all lands. Above all, there is Immaculate Mary who was heroic always; and above even her, infinitely above her, since He was God, is her Son Jesus Christ, with His infinite merits and His incalculable heroism and His unbounded love, who has descended to our humanity and united us to Himself.

Do you see what I am about to say? Our heroism was nothing; it was the saint's heroism and supremely Christ's, is everything. "Look then," cries the Church to God "on this infinite treasury of merits: on the Blood of the Son of God; on all the things He need not have done for us which He chose to do; on the glory of the martyrs and the heroism of the saints. This poor little child can do little or nothing now; he has ruined his life, but at least he has repented, and at least he is anxious and willing to do what he can to make up. Out of his love, such as it is, at any rate, he says his Rosary every day; at any rate, he has been to Holy Communion; at any rate, he has given of his pocket money to help to build a church for Thy glory. Then look down, O Father, not merely on his little efforts of love, but on this glorious treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints, and since he is their brother and one with them in grace, have pity on him for the sake of their merits, and let not only the Precious Blood of Christ, forgive his soul—for that it has done already, but let that flood of love and heroism go to pay his debt."

Can you doubt that when the Church of God prays that prayer it will not be answered? At any rate, the Church does not doubt it. Well, that is the doctrine of indulgences. Does it not seem to you reasonable and in full accord with all that we know of Christ and His love? I am yours very truly,

ROBERT HUGH BENSON

CATHOLIC SOCIAL WORK

CHURCH DOES NOT SEEK PUBLICITY AND GENERAL PUBLIC LITTLE DREAMS OF GOOD ACCOMPLISHED

There are persons who believe that Catholics are doing very little in practical social work, just as there may be found from time to time benighted individuals who are surprised to learn that the Catholic Church supports thousands of foreign missions, says America. One reason for this ignorance is the aversion of the average Catholic institution to publicity. While non-Catholic social agencies employ "publicity men" for the very laudable purpose of interesting the community in their work, Catholics, as a rule, so dislike advertising that they seem to forget the Scriptural injunction of letting their light shine before men. This tendency is greatly to be regretted.

In almost all large American cities splendid Catholic institutions are doing noble work in the field of social service unknown to thousands of Catholics in their own communities. If these institutions do not adopt proper means of bringing their activities to the notice of the public, it is hard to see with what right they can complain that the Catholic public does not support them. Blatant, untruthful forms of advertising are, of course, harmful; but a clear statement of an institution's purpose and needs would not only be most valuable to the social worker, but would,

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in many instances, win substantial support for the institution itself.

It has been well said that Catholics never know what Catholic institutions are doing for the outcast members of society until some municipal judge visits a Catholic hospital or reformatory and proceeds to let the public know, through the medium of the daily papers, what "our Catholic brethren are doing." There is much truth in this criticism. If Catholics do not support Catholic institutions as they should, the reason may be found, occasionally at least, in an unwise self-effacement on the part of the institutions. One of the strongest arguments in favor of a public inspection, properly conducted, of Catholic reformatories and social agencies is the fact that this inspection would let the world know the great good which Catholic institutions are effecting all over the country.—St. Paul Bulletin.

Do what you feel to be right, say what you think to be true, and leave with faith and patience the consequence to God.

First Announcement

We have in preparation a new book under the suggestive title:

"The Facts About Luther"

which will be ready for the market about October 1st, 1916. The work is written by the Rt. Rev. Mons. P. F. O'Hara, LL.D., who is well known as a writer and lecturer on Lutheranism. The object of the volume is to present the life of Luther in its different phases as outlined in the contents.

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