

IS ONE RELIGION AS GOOD AS ANOTHER?

BY REV. RICHARD L. CLARKE, S.J.

It is the fashion at the present day to say that it mattered little what a man believed as long as his life was good and he did no harm to any one. Even those who called themselves Christians sometimes talked as if every kind of religion were true. They told us there were many roads to heaven, and that it mattered not whether a man travelled by the Anglican road, or by the Nonconformist road, or by the Roman Catholic road, so long as he lived a good life. This was not the teaching of Our Blessed Lord, who said: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Light." As there could only be one truth which He taught, so there could be only one way which He appointed as the road to heaven. Neither was it the teaching of St. Paul, who wrote, "One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism," and "If any angel even from heaven teach you any other Gospel than that which you have received, let him be anathema." It was not the teaching of the Catholic Church which said, "Out of the Church there is no salvation." This teaching was a favorite object of attack by Protestants. They told us that it was a narrow, intolerant doctrine, and that it was inconsistent with the Divine compassion and at variance with the mercy of the all-merciful God. His object that evening was to show that so far from this being the case, this doctrine was in accordance with the teaching of our Lord and His Apostles. By faith we meant the acceptance, by God's supernatural help, of those truths which were revealed on His authority, not merely because our reason approved of them, but because we know that God had revealed them. Faith with the Catholic meant the acceptance of every dogma that the Church had defined; but what did it mean in the case of non-Catholics? It did not mean that it was impossible for non-Catholics to please God; on the contrary, there was for all who acted up to their light and in obedience to their conscience full opportunity of leading a life pleasing to God. They now came to the question of what was the minimum, the least amount of faith a man might have and save his soul. We looked out upon the heathen world and saw millions who knew but little of God. They had had no teaching, nothing but the natural light which God had given them, and that mixed up with a thousand superstitions. It was not necessary to go into heathen lands to find practical heathenism; in the slums and alleys of our own city were thousands who had been practically heathens from childhood upward. To say that these people must necessarily lose their souls would be hideous and inconsistent with the character of the God of Justice. Every one in the world had not only a fair chance of saving his soul, but much more than a fair chance, for God had implanted in every one a light which would teach them enough to enable them to find their way to heaven. To develop this point, mankind might be divided into three classes, from each of whom a different kind of faith was expected. The heathens, and the practical heathens of our own country would, if they were faithful to their conscience, learn that there was a personal God in heaven who created us, who would reward us for serving Him and who would punish us for doing evil, and to whom we owed obedience. This was all that God required of those who were brought up in practical heathenism. They might in the course of their lifetime have done an act of charity with a sort of idea of pleasing One above, who required of them charity towards others. We might hope that thousands of those whom the world thought had no chance of being saved would, through God's mercy, be received into the kingdom of heaven. Coming to the second class, the great majority of the people of this country had at least heard the name of Jesus Christ and had read the Bible. Any man of good will who read the sacred words of our Lord could not help being attracted by that figure who stood out most prominently before all the sons of men. No one could read His life without being irresistibly drawn toward Him, if he were a man of good will. When Christ came before us we could not help adoring Him and loving Him as our Lord and our God. But there were some men who

so far from being drawn by the Son of God were either indifferent to or were positively repelled by Him. These latter hated His Divine teaching because it was a contrast with their own lives. For all those who came within reach of the Gospel their salvation depended upon whether they were faithful to that message which our Lord had taught. There were many among the Protestant sects who acted up to the light which God gave them. They might never become Catholics, they were so rooted in prejudice that there was no guilt in remaining where they were. From their hearts they loved our Saviour, and sought as far as they could to carry out His Divine teaching. If they were perfectly certain that the religion in which they were brought up was the right one they could not do anything better than seek as far as they knew the teaching of our Lord to carry it out. That, however, in the present day was the case with comparatively few. There were very few at the present day who had not at some time or other a secret suspicion that perhaps the Catholic Church might be the only true Church of Jesus Christ. When that thought came into the mind of any man he was bound to inquire, and not to sit still and leave the matter doubtful, because our Lord was the Truth and could only have founded one religion on earth. The salvation of this third class depended on whether they carried out an honest search in order to find out what the religion was which our Lord had left here on earth. It was impossible for us to know whether those who had turned away from that secret whisper had deliberately sinned mortally. God was very merciful. There were some who shrank from bringing those they loved into poverty. Many Anglican clergymen to whom that thought had come had reflected that they had only their living to support their wife and children. He himself had known cases in which the conversion of Anglican clergymen had involved heroism on their part which could not be sufficiently praised. He knew of one who was working as a common laborer in a building-yard, and of another who was obliged to take the position of check-taker at one of our London theatres. God required of this third class of people that they should seek out the true Church, and submit themselves to its teaching, for the honest inquirer would, without the slightest doubt, be led into the One Fold and nowhere else. If they drifted off into infidelity or remained in some false religion, it would be their own fault. If other interests turned their thoughts aside from it, it was a dreadful responsibility for those who thus turned aside from Jesus Christ. —*Catholic Columbian*.

An Autograph Letter.

An autograph letter of Dean Swift has been discovered in an old manor-house in Berkshire. It is very characteristic, bristling with the witty divine's peculiar dry humor. The supposition is that it was addressed to a member of the Earl of Oxford's family. Here are some extracts:

"I have the honor to be captain of a band of nineteen musicians, which are, I hear, about five less than my friend the Duke of Chandos, and I understand music like a Muscovite; but my choir is so degenerate under the reigns of former Deans of famous memory, that the race of people called Gentleman Lovers of Music tell me I must be very careful in supplying two vacancies, which I have been for two years endeavouring to do. For you are to understand that in disposing these musical employments I determine to act directly contrary to Ministers of State, by giving them to those who best deserve. If you had recommended a person to me for a church-living in my gift, I would be less curious; because an indifferent parson may do well enough, if he be honest; but singers, like their brothers the poets, must be very good, or they are good for nothing."

The Duke of Chandos referred to is the man who stood for "Timon" in the poet Pope's satire, and was a patron of Handel, composer of the *Messiah*, first produced at the Fishamble Street Theatre in Dublin. There is a queer letter of the Dean's—not very delicate as we recollect—in the manuscript room of the British Museum.—*London Universac*.

There are 250,000 words in the English language, and most of them were used last Sunday by the woman who discovered after coming out of church, that her brand new hat was adorned with a tag on which was written, "Reduced to \$2.75."

Still There.—"There's gas escaping," said Bunting sniffing the air. "No," replied Larkin, also taking a sniff; "it seems to be here yet."

HERE'S A TRUE AMERICAN.

The Bigots of Omaha Called to Account by a Protestant.

The following spirited letter has been addressed to the editor of the Omaha Bee:

Sir,—I propose for one as a Protestant, the son of a Protestant minister, married to the daughter of a Protestant denomination, to enter publicly my protest against the reckless, relentless and unreasonable warfare which is now being waged in this city against my Catholic fellow-citizens. No Catholic has appealed to me for sympathy or suggested that I should say a word in his behalf. In fact, outside of my own family no one has a hint of my purpose to antagonize the sentiment which I regret to see so largely prevalent in this community. I am simply moved by my American sense of fair play to revolt against what appears to me to be an unwarrantable persecution of a respectable, law-abiding and numerous order of our citizens.

Nothing is so unreasonable, so bigoted, so virulent and dangerous as religious hatred. No cruelties have ever exceeded those perpetrated in the name of religion. Nothing is more un-American than political partisanship based upon religious differences. No antagonism in a community can so completely estrange neighbors and overturn good order, as that which arises from contentions over church relations. It is, therefore, a source of regret to fair-minded Americans who do not mix their political preferences to find a religious or a semi-religious issue at stake in elections.

In Omaha the anti Catholic society has so grown in numbers that it is in control of the city. Among its members are many persons entitled to confidence and respect, although they have joined an un-American secret political organization. But there are members and leaders in that order and kindred societies who are there for one or both of two reasons. Either they are fanatical anti-Catholics, or they hope for political advantages from their membership. It is unfortunately this class which makes the most noise and gives trend to the public utterances and private persecutions of the organization.

They and their sympathizers, among whom I am sorry to see some clergymen of the Protestant churches, have created a sentiment against Catholics in Omaha, which not only causes worthy people in that denomination personal pain, but affects their business, injures their reputation in the community and shuts off avenues of employment and advancement from their children to which, as American citizens, they are entitled.

This is unfair. Omaha has never suffered any evil from Catholics. Her best citizens are members of that Church. Her largest taxpayers are adherents of that faith. There has never been any attempt, or suggestion of an attempt on the part of that Church, or any of its members, to control the schools, the city government or the county affairs. Whatever may be true in other localities, as far as Omaha is concerned Catholicism has never been a force in politics which attempted to antagonize any public improvement, the public schools, or any well defined public policy. There is in my mind no more reason in Omaha for an anti-Catholic society than for an anti-



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Methodist or anti-infidel society. There can never, in America, be any excuse for a secret political-religious organization, and in this city there is less excuse, if possible, than anywhere else.

I am in favor of an amendment to the national constitution, which shall be strong enough to make it impossible for religious issues to have political consequence or importance. I am also in favor of taxing such property belonging to religious bodies as is not used by them for religious, charitable or educational purposes, but I do protest most solemnly against this un-American idea of asking whether a man believes in consubstantiation or transubstantiation, before determining to vote for or against him as a candidate for political office. Not the religious belief, or the nativity of the candidate's parents, but the merits of himself should be the test of his fitness or unfitness for public trust.

I hope that the people of Omaha will see that this antagonism has gone too far, and that the time has come to frown upon those fanatics who would fan smouldering embers of religious hatred into flames of discord. It is high time that the tide were turned. If the ill-will which has been stirred up between two classes of our citizenship is permitted to grow in intensity, it will be years before the good feeling of former times can be restored. We should be manly enough, every one of us, to accord to all our neighbors liberty of conscience, honesty of purpose and personal patriotism, and treat with them as friends and not as enemies of the commonwealth.

T. W. BLACKBURN.

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When he is inaugurated next March Mr. Cleveland will lack but a few days of being 56 years old, which is precisely the average age of presidents on accession. The oldest President was William Henry Harrison, who was 68; Buchanan was 62; Taylor, 65; Jackson and Adams, 62; Monroe, 59; Jefferson, Madison and J. Q. Adams, 58; Benjamin Harrison, 56; Hayes, 54; Lincoln, 52; Tyler and Arthur, 51; Polk and Fillmore, 50; Garfield and Pierce, 49; Cleveland, 48 and Grant, the youngest president, 47.

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The pretender to the Crown—A lady's bonnet.