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True Witness

HOOLEY AND FINNESSY

Discuss Parochial Regulations.

What is your opinion of that regulation of the diocese," says Hooley to Finnessy, "which limits the extent of each parish to a territory between certain streets, and specifies that all the Catholics who reside within this territory must give their allegiance to the parish church? I accompanied the priest in his late visitation of the parish and paid great attention to his instruction to the various families. While I fully agree with his views on most subjects, I can't approve of the statute referred to above nor his advice to the people that every Catholic should stick by his own parish and identify himself with his own congregation. Now, it seems to me that as the doors of our churches are open to all alike, the Catholic people, like the Protestant folks, should be free to attach themselves to whatever parish they prefer. To restrain them in church affairs of this kind looks like too much of a check on their religious liberty!"

"You never seem to be satisfied with anything," says Finnessy, "and hence I am not surprised that you are growing on this subject. I regret, however, that your experience with the priest on his visitation has not helped to broaden your views and convinced you of the wisdom and superiority of this diocesan regulation. In the first place, no intelligent Catholic will agree with you in asserting that we should have liberty to do as we please in church matters. Such a proposition would be an attempt to throw overboard the authority of the church in matters of discipline and, if allowed to continue, would result, as it has resulted amongst the Protestants, in throwing off the authority of the Church in matters of belief also. There is no unreasonable restriction of our liberty in submitting to the divine authority of the Church. If you dispute its right to interfere and dictate in religious affairs, you might as well contest the supremacy of the Almighty Himself and object to the restrictions of the Ten Commandments. With all your boasting of your rights, I scarcely believe you have yet arrived at the false conclusion that a man is justified in doing what he pleases."

"I have not arrived at any such conclusion with regard to essentials," says Hooley, "nor do I wish to be classed with Protestants in their ideas of belief or discipline. But I have been informed that the free system, or the privilege of claiming any church you please as your parish, is in existence in Baltimore, in New York, and in several other dioceses of the country, and imagined its introduction would result very advantageously in this diocese also. Let me give you only one illustration of its advantage. Suppose my pastor was a crank and that he and I had some unpleasant dispute regarding some subject, see the advantage it would be to both of us, and what disagreeable meetings could be avoided if I could sever my present relationship with him and claim some other church as my parish. You see, Finnessy, that the Free System, as I call it, has much to recommend it!"

"I entirely disagree with you," says Finnessy, "and condemn your foolish conclusions. The very instance you bring forward in proof of your view would demonstrate that the free system, as you call it, would result in disorder and would be the very worst aid to the interest of religion; in fact, it would be an encouragement to both priest and parishioner to continue their quarrel and remain enemies for life. It would furnish you and the priest the opportunity to keep up your coolness and ill towards each other, whereas the other system would tend to draw you together in the affectionate relationship of pastor and parishioner, and would compel both of you for peace sake and good example to bury the hatchet and become friends. This in all probability would never be the result if you and your pastor could avoid and dispense with each other. Yes, Hooley, the free system has much to recommend it—as a promoter of evil!"

"You talk," says Hooley, "as if you were convinced of the superiority of the present system over all others. I presume you can give good and strong reasons for your belief." "I am convinced that I have the best and soundest reasons for my belief," says Finnessy, "and that any convictions on the subject are the result of reasoning and experience. In the first place I maintain

that it is the best and the only way by which Catholics can be thoroughly known to their pastors and by which their pastors can be properly known to their people. In confirmation of this I need only state that as the limits of each parish extend at most but a few squares in each direction from the church, and as the priests of each parish are always on duty either waiting on the sick, looking after neglected children or seeking out the intemperate or indifferent ones of the flock, every Catholic family in the district becomes perfectly known to the priests, while the priests in turn become familiar acquaintances to every one! As a consequence the young and old of the district regularly wend their way to their parish church, they feel entirely at home during the religious services as they hear and see the priests they know so well, their clergy are easy of access whenever they are needed, and a mutual affection and interest bind them both together as pastors and people. Now, under the free system I maintain that both old and young are deprived of the due interest and attention of their priests and that carelessness and loss of faith are the probable results to very many. Let me suppose, for example, that a Catholic man and his family who live within the limits of this parish could claim allegiance to some other church which is situated two or four or even six miles from their home; how can that man or his family know any priest or be known by any priest to advantage, and what salutary influence can a priest exercise over the children whom he rarely meets because they live at such a long distance from the church they call their parish? The pastor of such a family, if he knows them at all, most likely has not the time to travel so far to visit them when they require it; the parents purposely avoid the neighboring priests as they would avoid Protestant ministers, lest it might be suspected that they owed them any allegiance, with the result that the members of such a family will most probably become entirely neglected and careless, and between two stools will finally fall to the ground! The consequence of living at only a moderate distance from the church is indeed sad and deplorable under the present system; Catholics have grown so lazy in late years that the church must be built at their doors; how many more of them would miss Mass on Sunday morning if their neighboring priests had no authority to visit them or correct them for the neglect of their religious duties! In the second place, the free system would not only take away the people from the care of the neighboring priests and would encourage their indifference to Mass, but would most likely result in a great neglect of the sick and it is almost a certainty that many of them would die without the last sacraments. By your arrangement, Hooley, any unfortunate fellow who got suddenly sick would have a poor chance of being prepared for his journey to eternity if the priest who should attend him would have a long distance to travel. Let me assure you, my dear man, that under such a system of discipline the pastor of any church whose adherents are scattered in all parts of the city, and who is desirous that all of them shall receive proper spiritual care, would be compelled to secure the services of an army of priests, together with a fat treasury for their car fares and expenses; while the priests themselves in the proper discharge of their duties would be on the go from morning until night unless they could hear confessions and give absolution by telephone! Nor is your example of how well the free system works in Baltimore and New York more fortunate for your side than your illustration of the crank pastor and his parishioner. I have no definite knowledge regarding things in Baltimore, but I have recently seen a printed appeal to the late Archbishop of New York from several of his priests, in which they lamented the inconvenience and injustice of the free system and earnestly requested the introduction of some more simple and equitable arrangement by which each parish should be designated by fixed limits or boundaries!"

"For the people in general I admit," says Hooley, "that the free system is not the best. You will admit, however, that a Catholic can claim any church as his parish in which he rents a pew; and also that Church regarding the support of our he fulfills the Fifth Precept of the pastors if he contributes according

to his means in the church where he assists at Mass. There are several old Catholic families in the city who have moved into suburban districts, but who still attend the last Mass on Sundays in the pews hallowed by many old associations. You certainly would not try to prevent this!"

"To the first part of your remark," says Finnessy, "I have a decided objection. To rent a pew in any church for the sole purpose of occupying it at the late Mass on Sunday should never of itself entitle the owner to membership in that parish. There are social and selfish reasons which frequently influence Catholics in selecting the places where they practice their devotions, but these reasons should not be considered sufficient to put aside the statutes of the diocese or give the renters of pews any parochial privileges. On the contrary, their implied disregard of their own pastors with their disobedience to the spirit of diocesan regulations, should be sufficient in the eyes of many to exclude them from exceptional favors! Neither will it in my opinion satisfy their obligation under the Faith Precept if they contribute to the support of religion outside their own parish church. If their church was endowed or even free from debt, and there was no heavy pressure on the treasury for current expenses, it might be a matter of indifference as to where or how they contributed, but if the parish church was in need of money and these people went elsewhere to present their offerings where perhaps they were scarcely needed, do you mean to tell me that such a transferring of duty can be regarded as a contributing to the support of our pastors according to the wording and intent of the Fifth Commandment? A man with a selfish conscience may so imagine, but a well-instructed Catholic can see in the circumstance only one conclusion, namely, that he is bound to give his contributions in his own parish. If he chooses to rent a pew in another church or to give generously to outside charities, so much the better; but no generosity to outside objects can excuse his neglect of local obligations or dispense him from aiding his own pastor! With regard to his attendance at the late Mass in the church of his fathers, I honor him for still clinging to old customs and hallowed memories, but would severely condemn him for doing so if he makes it an excuse for ignoring the authority of his lawful pastor or shirking the obligations of his own parish church. Let me candidly confess to you, Hooley, that long observation has convinced me that mere renters of pews, with rare exceptions, have added but little to the treasury of any church. They never assist their own churches, under the plea that they contribute elsewhere; the churches they frequent are seldom enthusiastic about their generosity for any object, because such persons, as the late Doctor Moriarty sarcastically remarked, never rank higher than a congregation of pew holders! So you need not attempt a bluff on this subject with me!"

"I still maintain," says Hooley, "that a Catholic should be free to attend whatever church he pleases and should receive the sacraments from whatever priest he pleases! If I was seriously sick I would consider it a great punishment if I could not receive the last rights of the church from the priest I preferred." "Hooley," says Finnessy, "the ideas you have expressed give you more the stamp of a Protestant than a Catholic, and whoever encouraged you to entertain them was a bigger fool than yourself! Ideas of this kind would result in turning the holy Catholic religion into a man worship, and would lead one to believe that it was not the grace of the sacraments you wanted when sick, but the words of human consolation. Catholics who properly understand their faith lose sight of the name and personal qualities of the priest when he performs his sacred functions, because they look upon all priests, in the language of St. Paul, as the ministers of Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God. It is, of course, proper to have a regular confessor, and St. Francis of Sales tells us that we should select him among a thousand; but that does not mean that we should foolishly long for any one in particular or that we should keep away from Mass and the sacraments because we don't see the person we want! The church, on account of the difficulties often connected with confession gives us the liberty of confessing to whatever priest we please; when we are sick any approved priest can give us the sacraments of penance, but the other sacraments, especially those which are intended for the dying, must be administered by the priests of the parish church as dictated by the common sense and ordered by the statutes of the diocese. Any different regulation would lead to neglect of the

people and to disrespect of the sacred mysteries. It would deprive the pastor of the opportunity of knowing in what dispositions his parishioners were dying, and would also present the indefensible irreverence of the Blessed Sacrament being needlessly carried for miles through the city when the local priests could conveniently administer it to the dying just as well. Thank heaven, Hooley, no prudent priest would endorse your views on this serious subject or would encourage his people to look for distinctions in the sacred ministry. The powers of the priesthood are the same in all!"

"But," says Hooley, "I have seen good and devout Catholics in regular attendance at other churches than their own, and I understand that they were encouraged in the practice by very zealous priests, who not only invited them, but enticed them to do so. If the practice was very wrong, I cannot imagine it could be encouraged in this manner!"

"This is a mighty delicate question," says Finnessy, "and cannot be satisfactorily settled by ignorant fellows like ourselves. If a pious female imagines that she can receive superior spiritual advice from a confessor in some distant part of the city, or if some sensitive sinner takes a fancy to the preaching or direction of some particular priest, no matter how far away stationed, all the Bishops in the country could not, and will not, keep them at home until they have learned common sense by experience! With regard to the encouragement given to such persons to leave their own parishes and attend the services at other places, I prefer not to express my opinion. Priests are human like other mortals and can make mistakes even in a good cause. Moreover, I might accuse them of selfishness when they are only exercising zeal. Therefore instead of my own I prefer to give you the opinion of the celebrated missionary. Father Bernard Maguire, S.J., as I many times heard him express it in his mission sermons to the people. God be good to his noble soul! 'Tis he who was the strong believer in the oneness of the priesthood, in the doctrine that one priest has as much power as another, in the obligation of all Catholics to remain in their own parishes and in the advantage to all of assisting at Mass and receiving the sacraments in their own churches! I now can call to mind his scathing reproof of those Catholics who showed their irreverence for their lawful pastors by going elsewhere to hear Mass on the Lord's day. 'How disrespectful,' he used to say, 'is such conduct to the man whom the Bishop has placed over them as their pastor! And how useless would it result for the Bishop himself to purchase ground for a new church and send a priest to organize a new congregation if the Catholics living in the new district felt free to wander off where they pleased and leave the poor priest to struggle alone with his debts and difficulties!'

"He went even farther and in no sparing language held up to censure and the charge of unprofessional conduct any priest, be he diocesan or religious, who presented motives before any Catholic in order to induce him to withdraw from his own parish and connect himself with some other congregation. In his eyes this was not only an unfriendly interference with a brother's rights, but was an encouragement to a species of man-worship. As an illustration of his views in the matter, and in order to impress on his hearers their loyalty to their own church, he instanced the answer of a prominent St. Louis Judge who many years ago became a convert to the faith. This judge lived at that time in the suburbs of the city, in a district in which was erected a small temporary chapel. On being asked by some friends to drive to some of the prominent churches on Sunday and listen to the eloquent preachers, he decidedly answered: 'No! Since I understand that the Holy Sacrifice is the same no matter where offered, I will continue to assist at Mass in my own little church; whatever edification I can give shall be given in the place where it is God's will I belong, and if the pastor were a colored man, he will receive my assistance and respect as long as I reside in the district.' Hooley, where do you hear of missionaries talking like that to the people now?"

"It appears to me, however," continued Finnessy, now quite in earnest, "that you have some strange notions about discipline in the church. Don't you know that discipline indicates order, while its absence means confusion and guerilla warfare! Hooley, if you were a priest I very much doubt whether you would entertain your present ideas of what you call religious liberty. In the supposition that you were a priest, do you believe that your Bishop could persuade you to undertake the building of a new

church or that you would attempt to carry on the work of an old one if your congregation had the liberty to walk away when they pleased and could leave you alone with your burdens? Would you admire the conduct of a brother priest who, no matter how holy or zealous he might be, would systematically invade your territory and would indirectly try to lessen your influence with your people? Could you feel exceedingly pleased if with sinister motives he visited your parishioners and, with the promise of giving them superior social advantages or more solemn devotions, would induce them to rent his pews or join his religious sodalities or in any other manner cause them to withdraw from their own church? Hooley, I scarcely think you could! On the contrary, you would brand such interference as conduct unworthy of a priest and as a deception of the innocent people, and would denounce it as a dishonorable injustice and a species of sheep stealing! Yet, Hooley, such would be the condition of things in the diocese if we lived under the free system! Sheep stealing in olden times was looked upon as a very mean business, and I have yet to learn that its agents have grown to be respectable. For the life of me, Hooley, I can't understand how you can excuse any man who tampers with his neighbor's fold, except on the supposition that you sympathize with the trade of your grandfather!"

"That will do," says Hooley; "you have said enough! I have succeeded in probing you until I received the information I wanted! I had also a personal reason for asking for it because the members of our family attend services at different churches and occasionally treat each other to a controversy on the respective merits and rights of priests. For myself I have always maintained, and have carried my conviction into practice, that every good Catholic should be governed by the statutes of the diocese and should assist at the services and support the parish where he lives. I never believed it was proper to go away from my own church, but felt it was God's will that I should assist at Mass and receive the sacraments from my own priests in the spirit of edification. I never believed it was the proper thing for any priest to invade the territory of a brother and hold out inducements to the people to leave their own church. Such interference with the rights of another I have always considered not only unjust, but ungentlemanly, and, to speak candidly, I have wondered at the patience of the aggrieved in permitting it. If the prowler stealthily seeks his opportunity to break into the fold, the shepherd is surely justified in defending his flock and in calling on the police for assistance! Hooley, the Free System, like Free Trade, will never prosper the country either in politics or religion. Let us have protection and order through the Diocesan Statutes! Good morning!"—Z. in St. Michael's Parish Calendar.

The Ideal Physician.

A conscientious physician is one of God's best gifts to man, and from the early days of the office of physician has been held in high veneration in the Church. St. Luke was by profession a physician, the favorite companion of the great St. Paul in his apostolic labors, one of the four inspired writers of the Gospel of Christ, and the writer of the only inspired history of the Infant Church, the "Acts of the Apostles." Ever since his day, the great schools of medicine placed under the immediate control of the Church have aimed at fostering in the souls of their pupils that deep spirit of faith and piety, that innocence of soul and purity of life which can alone enable the physician to be what he ought ever to be, the second minister of God's mercy and healing power at the sick bed and in the bosom of Christian families. Hence the Christian religion has ever labored to impress on the minds of both physicians and surgeons that they are the custodians of the bodily health and temporal honor of individuals and families, just as the priest is the guardian of the soul's welfare, the healer of its wounds, its divinely appointed guide in the paths of spiritual health and perfection.

The physician, in all Catholic countries, is considered to be the conscientious assistant of the priest by the sick bed and in the hour of mortal danger, prompting the patient to be reconciled with God, and in urgent cases refusing the ministrations of his profession to the sick or dying person till the latter has con-

plied with the divine commands and placed the soul's interests in perfect security. In thus adding the priest in his most sacred functions, and helping the operation of God's most merciful ordinances for the soul's salvation, the physician also finds by experience that he is mightily furthering the success of his success of his own salutary art, and promoting the cure of the body. For besides the natural connection between peace of conscience and the subsidence of physical pain and irritation, there is a special promise annexed to the reception of Extreme Unction of alleviation from suffering and restoration to health, when God's fatherly providence deems it best for the sufferer.

The Archangel Raphael, "the Divine Healer," was sent by God to bestow his rarest blessings on two widely separated branches of a Hebrew family living in exile and distinguished for exalted virtue. To the head of one household he restored eyesight, and to the other he brought the grace of liberation from the obsession of an evil spirit, whilst both families were united in faith and charity by the nuptials of their children brought about by their heavenly benefactor. Thus Raphael became to the early Christians what he had been to the Jewish people—the ideal of the true physician, acting under the Divine guidance, and seeking the cure of the sick soul whilst laboring to heal the body. How many imitators of Raphael and Luke have not the Christian ages beheld since the beginning?

The history of every country in Christendom during the Middle Ages is filled with the most instructive and edifying stories concerning the devotion of physicians to their twofold task of promoting every good work while laboring constantly for the advancement of the sciences pertaining to their own calling. The Church showed her care for this professional excellence by founding central schools of medicine, and raising some of them to the rank of a university, as well as by her liberality in promoting the splendor and efficiency of the medical schools existing in such great centers of learning as Paris, Florence and Rome.

The honor, too, in which she held physicians soon led to their rising in popular estimation. In the Italian Republics they formed a most honorable class, whose members not only attained to great wealth, but very often filled the highest offices in the state. Just as, all through these ages of faith, the lawyers were encouraged to form separate guilds and confraternities devoted not only to self-protection and mutual encouragement, but to all sorts of works of charity, even so, and much more so, did the members of the medical profession unite for the like purpose.

The deep and sudden changes effected in Catholic countries by modern revolutions have not altogether blotted out these admirable unions. Even where they have fallen asunder the best elements of them have gone over to other newer and more active bodies like that of St. Vincent de Paul in France. Foremost among the noble men whose deeds of piety and beneficence have contributed so much to preserve and propagate religion in the kingdom of St. Louis, are to be found physicians. The long struggle they had undergone to rise to distinction in their profession, and the manifold opportunities furnished by it for mixing with all classes of men and women poisoned with Voltairean unbelief was viewed by them as the providential means of doing their duty by the sick souls brought under their influence.

Since then what heroic examples of patriotic devotion and Christian charity did these same men—not only physicians, but lawyers, students, members of the Societies of St. Vincent de Paul, of St. Francis Xavier, and St. Francis Regis—display on the field of battle, in the crowded hospitals, during the horrors of more than one siege, and whilst their country was at the darkest hour of its destiny.

This country has many noble physicians who are true to the noblest attribute of their high calling. Among them are happily found many non-Catholic men, whose reputation for liberality and broadmindedness give them place in the Apostolate of the Catholic physician.

Every physician should possess in the highest possible degree a thorough knowledge, theoretic and practical, of his profession, a deep devotion to his calling, a lively faith, and an unblemished reputation. The true Christian who feels himself honored in being God's instrument for the preservation of life, the increase of health, the happiness of families, and the welfare of the community, should ever bear in mind, ever strive where there is danger of death, that the interests of the soul are ever dearer to God than bodily health or even life.—Catholic Columbian.