ARE CATHOLICS BIGOTS?

A CHARGE THAT FAILS WHEN THE REASONS FOR THEIR ZEAL FOR THE FAITH ARE UNDERSTOOD.

Rev. F. M. de Zulueta, S. J., in the Catholic Weekly, London.

We may here make some observations upon the charge of "bigotry" often leveled at Catholics. That a Catholic, like another, may at times deserve this reproach no one cares to deny, any more than that, in common with the rest of frail mortality, he may be guilty of other faults or crimes. But in so far as he becomes really blameworthy in this respect, he acts contrary to the exigencies and teaching of his faith. Bigotry, in any genuine sense of the term, by no means results from the necessary aloofness of his religious attitude towards opposing faiths. The chief difficulty here is to arrive at a correct solution of the question: "What is true bigotry?" and to understand what sort of religious attitude really deserves a name which conveys a reproach.

If we turn to one of our up-to-date standard dictionaries we read, for example: "Bigotry—blind or excessive zeal, esp, in religious matters" (Chambers' Twentieth Century Dictionary.)

According to this definition, which substantially agrees with what other dictionaries give us, it is not "zeal" merely that constitutes bigotry, but "blind" and "excessive" zeal. The "blindness" must obviously refer to some faculty of preception or apprehension; in other words, blindness in the intellectual faculty is here meant which excludes from the bigot's mental field of view good and valid reasons for a more tolerant estimate of other people's religious convictions, and results in a zeal exceeding reasonable measure. Now let us apply the dictionary definition to the mental attitude of Catholics in deeming all faiths but their own to be objectively false, and all other forms of worship objectively opposed to the will of the Divine Founder of Christianity. We need only deal with their view of other faiths. For, since worship is faith in action, it will naturally follow the nature of the worshiper's beliefs.

IS CATHOLIC ZEAL "BLIND?"

Now, is a Catholic's zeal "blind" in thus condemning as unsound all other forms of Christian profession? He would assuredly need to be purblind to many cogent facts were he to judge otherwise. To take an instance: He believes it to be "a fact of revelation" that Christ intended His followers to be religiously one. . . .

So perfect was this religious oneness to be which our Saviour had in view, that He shrinks not from a comparison apparently hyperbolic—for He compares it to the most perfect unity of that Divine Nature shared by Him in common with His Eternal Father (v., 21). Then, at all events, as Catholics see, this unity of religion must be as complete as is possible amongst men with God's assistance. But a religious unity that does not so much as embrace oneness in religious principles, or doctrines of highest import, evidently falls far short of what men may achieve. For uniformity of belief is certainly obtainable by them, for the simple reason that it has actually been obtained, in the Catholic Church, for nineteen centuries. . . .

This unity of the true Church is a constant, living fact in every age. According to our Lord's own teaching (ibid v., 21 23), it is a sign "that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me"—a visible mark stamped upon His church from its beginning, even to the end of the world. Where it is not, there the Church is not. The "hallmark" is missing.

The Catholic perceives the only too evident lack of doctrinal union in all bodies resulting from the Reformation; he even finds them naively admitting the fact, and concludes that the true faith of Christ cannot lie with them. Further, when he sees, moreover, that this footprint of His divine mission left by Christ upon the sands of time can be found nowhere outside the pale of his own communion, he must, in ordinary logic, infer that either his, and his alone, is the one true religion of Christ, or else that the Church declared by Christ to be lasting and indestructible has ceased to exist. But this failure would falsify other promises of our Lord (Matt. xvi., 18, xxviii., 20, John xiv., 16).

So the zeal of a Catholic for his faith rests upon good and solid reasons, though not on the aforesaid one alone.

THE BIBLE "ONLY."

To touch briefly upon another reason—Biblical inspiration.

He sees that most non Catholic bodies around him make the "Bible Only," as read by each private individual, the exclusive rule of their faith, and will accept no doctrine as divine that is not clearly to be found therein or that can not be fully proved thereby. On the other hand, he knows from history that no such rule of Christian faith could possibly have existed for some centuries after the faith of Christ had been already preached to the world and accepted by considerable portions of it, for the simple reason that the written New Testament was not to be had. Moreover, that when its books were eventually collected together, it was the "Roman" Catholic church that separated out from the mass of sacred books in existence those that were inspired Scripture from those that were not. So that the very basis of "Reformed" churches — the inspiration of the Scriptures — rests upon the testimony and authority of the Catholic Church. For a book cannot effectually bear witness to its own inspiration, or even to its infallibility — any more than a beggar, asking alms on the strength of his long and pitiful story, can be a sufficient witness to his own truthfulness. All this the Catholic sees. Is he, then, unreasonable in rejecting as undoubtedly false all religious built upon such a quicksand as "the Bible Only," privately interpreted? Or does not his own steadfast and better-founded belief in the inspiration of God's Written Word oblige him to hold that Church to be the true one which has from the beginning been the one witness to this very inspiration? Plainly, then, the zeal shown by a Catholic for his faith does not proceed from any "blindness" to good reasons.

IS CATHOLIC ZEAL "EXCESSIVE?"

Now, let us ask further: Is Catholic zeal "excessive?" Does the tenacity with which a Catholic clings to his beliefs, excluding all others, exceed the bounds of moderation? If it does, the extravagance must lie either in the degree of his tenacity, or else in allowing himself to be led by the depth of his convictions into immoderate conduct towards those who differ from him.

First, then, can tenacity of principle be excessive? Supposing the principle to stand in a person's mind as a most certain and infallible truth, such excess is manifestly impossible. Were we to say of any one that he was excessively attached to the belief that Port Arthur is fallen, the observation would be taken for a joke. In other words, there can be no excess, no extravagance, no obstinacy, worthy of the name, in allowing no doubt upon a matter that is seen by the mind to be absolutely true. Any other course would betray a defect of reason.

Then where can "excessive" zeal enter? There is indeed room for it in conduct. In truth, it is mainly, if not exclusively, in the sphere of conduct that true bigotry appears, if it appear at all. Not that there can be too great zeal and self devotion in a man's private practice of religion. Religion being another word for the service of our Lord God, no one can be too faithful nor too earnest in tendering to Him that which is His inalienable right. This is not saying that excess in distinctively religious practices is impossible. For these form but a portion of religion, which requires, besides, that other duties equally imposed by God should not be sacrificed for pious exercises of a voluntary character. But, with this understanding, there can be no excess in the private pursuit of religion. The protest heard at times in another land, "Mais je ne suis pas bigot, comprenez," (But, you understand, I'm not a bigoted Catholic!) does, it is true, mean in plainer English: I'm not excessively attached to my religious obligations! But this frame of mind bespeaks an indifference to the claims of God which is not necessary for freeing a person from the imputation of bigotry in the ordinary acceptation of the word.

REAL BIGOTRY IS UNCHARITABLE CONDUCT.

The excessive zeal, therefore, truly constituting bigotry consists neither in the tenacity of one's own faith nor in the fervent and exclusive practice of the same, but should be described as uncharitableness (in thought, word, deed or omission) towards those whose religious beliefs differ from our own, precisely on account of that difference. Provided such uncharity be absent, the term "bigot" can only be applied to a Catholic, however fervent, by a gross misuse of the term, even as set forth in our standard dictionaries.

Daily life, nevertheless, undoubtedly affords us examples of true bigotry. Thus, to wantonly hurt the religious convictions of others by abuse and ill-natured ridicule, to speak harshly of individuals on doctrinal grounds, are instances of bigotry. Even where the interests of Catholic truth require a severe handling of other faiths, care should be taken to show that systems, not persons, form the object of attack, especially where mention of persons becomes unavoidable. Again, nothing but gross bigotry could lead a master or mistress to deny equal justice to a servant or employe simply on the ground of difference in religious beliefs and worship. So, too, is it pure bigotry to dismiss a public servant, otherwise admitted to be competent in his or her charge, on account of a conscientious change of faith displeasing to authorities. But such forms of the vice in question are, we fear, mainly to be witnessed outside Catholic circles.

On the other side it is not bigotry, but fidelity to conscience and honorable firmness of principle to refuse to speak before others as though they were "a good deal to be said" in favor of other religions; to decline directly to aid in any way the spreading of another creed firmly believed to be false; to insist on having one's children brought up in surroundings positively the most favorable to their religion and its practices. For here we have reverted to the sphere of principle, effecting the fulfilment of our own religious duty, not of dealings with our non Catholic neighbors, in non religious matters. In the field of politics men of the world regard a similar exclusiveness as high-principled, although political theories are proverbially matters for free debate. Politicians even seek to enhance the authority of their opinions by borrowing terms from the province of religion, talking of "loyalty to political creeds" and the eschewing of "political heresies." Yet in the case of religious faiths we have to do with principles of a far higher order and authority—with truths revealed (or held as being revealed) by Infallible Truth Itself, "Who knows no change, nor shadow of alteration" (James i., 17).

BIGOTRY AND CATHOLIC LAWS FOR MIXED MARRIAGES.

The religious attitude of Catholics towards others bears upon the question of marriage with baptized non-Catholics. As is well known, the Catholic Church in reluctantly giving leave to one of her subjects for entering upon a nuptial union of the above kind does so only on certain well defined conditions. The religious ceremony must be performed by a Catholic priest only. The Catholic party must have fullest freedom to practice her faith. All children of the marriage—male or female—must be educated in that same faith; and the Catholic must endeavor by discreet and lawful means to influence the non-Catholic towards conversion. These conditions, to which the non-Catholic must pledge himself, suggest the difficulty.

Surely these conditions invade the conscientious rights of the non Catholic aspirant to a Catholic hand, who disowns all allegiance to Rome. What right has the Catholic church to dictate to the consciences of non Catholics? The answer is that she does not dictate to them; in fact she is not addressing them personally at all. She simply deals—as she has a right to deal—with her own subject, who, in turn, acknowledges the church's right to intervene, but still desires to contract, a marriage that is repugnant to her, because proved by long experience to be highly dangerous to the souls of her subjects and of their children. To her own subject she says, in effect: If you are resolved to contract a mixed marriage contrary to my express warning, well—in order to save you from still greater spiritual evils, or else in view of weighty reasons which you allege for the step—I will grant the needful dispensation. For if you married without leave you would profane the holy sacrament of marriage, receiving it in mortal sin. Only you cannot cast to the winds your unalterable Catholic principles — you cannot marry under conditions that would be a virtual denial of the truth that the Catholic faith alone is the true way of salvation, for yourself, your future offspring and even for your spouse elect—whether the latter recognize the fact or not.

Less than this the church could not say without convicting herself before the world of plainest inconsistency and gross imposture.

A NOBLE ACTION.

Mary Taylor, a member of the Salvation Army in Des Moines, Ia., stood on a street corner recently and held out a plate to the public for contributions to give a Christmas dinner to poor folk of that city. The wind was high and keen. The woman was blue with cold.

Among the shoppers passing by at noon was Mrs Arthur Hyde, wife of a millionaire. She watched the Salvation Army girl for some minutes. Then, admiring her and pitying her, she went up to her aid said:

"Give me the plate. It is time you had a chance to get warm. I'll take your place. Go home till 5 o'clock."

The grateful girl accepted her volunteer substitute and went home, while there, on the street corner, from noon till 5 o'clock, stood the wealthy Mrs. Hyde, questing for the poor in the name of Christ. She did not mind the cold, she did not mind the curiosity of the idle, she did not mind the stare of the impudent, for she was buoyed up by the will to do a kindness to another woman and by the opportunity to perform an act of charity for the love of God. And when Mary Taylor returned Mrs. Hyde put a substantial offering of her own on the plate.

"It is time," she says "that we who are well to do should begin to imitate the self-sacrifice of the Salvation Army.

This paper rejoices when any good work is done for Christ's sake. It is pleased to tell its readers of Mrs. Hyde's kind deed.—Catholic Columbian.

COMMENDS DAUGHTERS OF THE FAITH.

Episcopal Bishop Doane of Albany, N Y., has written a commendatory letter to the Daughters of the Faith, the society of Catholic women banded together to fight the divorce evil in which he says:

"I have taken a keen interest in every effort that is making to do away with the discreditable and disastrous frequency and facility of American divorce, and I am most anxious to promote every effort that may tend to bring about unity of action among all Christian people of whatever religious name. The two chapters in the manual of the Daughters of the Faith on divorce and on the sacrament of marriage contain much with which I am in accord. The church of England in her canon law and the church of Canada forbid the remarriage of all divorced persons. The Protestant Episcopal church allows remarriage only to the innocent party divorced for adultery of the other person. I hope and believe that the day is not far distant when we shall go back to the old law of the church of England. Meanwhile our present canon surrounds such remarriage with much difficulty and prevents it by many safeguards."

CATHOLIC NOTES.

Preparations are already going on to celebrate in 1908 the jubilee of the Pope's ordination as a priest. Asked the character of the festivities he desired, the Pope answered. "I wish the celebration to be one of a strictly religious character." Committees will be organized all over the world with the object of presenting to the Pope large offerings during the jubilee Mass which he will celebrate in St. Peter's in the presence of pilgrims from all countries.

Rev. J. C. Thompson, formerly curate of St. Andrew's Anglican church, Stockwell Green, London, S. W., has been received into the Catholic church. Mr. Thompson comes of a well-known North of Ireland family.

How to Deal with Non-Catholics.

We find the following in "A Voice from the Wilderness": "In dealing with non-Catholics learn the difference between firmness and harshness. Also learn how to be mild without any mixture of weakness. But you might say suppose a bigoted Protestant insults me? In answer: Suppose you were a physician and your delirious patient should curse you, and even strike you? The love of our non-Catholic neighbors is a law all Catholics acknowledge. Not all however, realize that it is a law with a penalty. Listen to our Redeemer: 'With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. (Matt vii,1.) What would become of us if Holy church treated us with the same indifference in our religious necessities as we treat our non-Catholic brethren?"

Today let us rise and go to our work. To-morrow we shall rise and go to our reward.

NEW BOOK.

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DIOCESE OF LONDON.

PRESENTATION TO THE REV. FATHER MCCORMACK.

The people of Ashfield parish completely surprised their pastor, the Rev. M. McCormack, on Dec. 24th, 1905, when a number of gentlemen of the congregation approached the sanctuary just as Father McCormack was coming down from the altar after Mass, and presented him with the following address, which was accompanied with a substantial purse of gold:

Rev. and Dear Father—We, a number of your parishioners, in behalf of the congregation, approach you with some diffidence (knowing your extreme modesty on occasions of this kind) to express in some way, however feeble our earnest appreciation and heartfelt gratitude to you for the manner in which you have brought to so successful a completion the grand edifice you have so recently erected to the honor and glory of God in our parish. We, must, however, say that it is mainly owing to your untiring industry, doubtless energy and perseverance, together with your strict economy, business ability and broad charity, that this grand result has been so happily achieved. We must also state that while erecting the material you have not neglected the spiritual edifice, as you were ever ready at any hour however inconvenient to minister to our spiritual necessities and requirements. And we now ask you to accept this small gift as a feeble reminder that your efforts in our midst have not been unappreciated.

In conclusion, dear Father, we wish you all the compliments of this joyous season, hoping that you may be spared many years to continue and extend the many good works you have been so happily instrumental under Divine Providence, in accomplishing amongst us.

Signed on behalf of the congregation, Morgan Dalton, John J. Griffin, John Long, John Stiles, Thos. O'Connor, Michael Bowler, James Foley, James Gilmore, Thos. O'Reilly.

Father McCormack replied as follows:

My dear people—I thank you very sincerely for this address in which you bestow much praise on me, and for this purse by which you show that your praise is not of the kind that may have little or no value. I receive both with much pleasure and regard them as very much more than what you are pleased to call a feeble reminder of your appreciation of my service in this parish. I know that a great work has been done here within the past few years. This magnificent house of God built and furnished in a style that would do honor to the Episcopal parish of London diocese, is an achievement that may be looked upon as a proof of your zeal and sincerity in the service of God and of loyal co-operation with your ecclesiastical superior. Your work and your money were freely, heartily and generously given to accomplish the end proposed by His Lordship the Bishop and I know he is highly pleased with you, for you have done nobly and well.

I am very grateful to you for the many ways in which you have assisted me to do my share of the work and I feel doubly grateful when I hear you express the desire that we continue the good works so happily begun. I do not forget, and I am sure you do not, to thank God above and before all. A PARISHIONER.

AN ARCHBISHOP'S ESTIMATE OF THE SUBSCRIBER WHO WILL NOT PAY.

This letter was written many years ago by a prelate, now dead, but its doctrine is still sound and applicable:

"Sir—I have often been pained and astonished at the frequent appeals of editors and proprietors of newspapers to their subscribers, urging them to pay their just debts. Catholics at least cannot be unaware of their obligations in this matter, and that absolution to a penitent heartily sorry for his sins does not free him from the obligations of paying his just debts. The atonement for oblivion of justice in this world will certainly be exacted in the next. The editors and proprietors of newspapers, on their part, give their time, the product of a high education and experience, together with their money for stationery, printing and wages to employes, and they expect and should have, in common justice, a return, often by no means adequate, for their outlay. A man who will not pay for a paper he subscribes for, is a retainer of another man's goods, and is on a level with a thief.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN JOSEPH LYNCH,
Archbishop of Toronto.

MARRIED.

BECK - TEEFY. — At St. Mary's church, Richmond Hill, by the Rev. Father Teefy, C. S. B., brother of the bride, assisted by the parish priest, Rev. Father McMahon, Nicholas D. D. Beck, Esq., K. C., LL. B. of Edmonton, Alta., to Miss Louisa Adelaide Teefy, second daughter of Mathew Teefy, J. P., P. M., Richmond Hill, Ont.

DIED.

GAYNOR.—At Vancouver, B. C., John Gaynor, son of Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Gaynor of Wawanosh. May he rest in peace!

DUGGAN—Of your charity pray for the soul of Bessie Duggan of Wyoming who died Dec. 18. May she rest in peace.

CAMPBELL — In West Williams on Jan. 4, 1906 Mrs. Mary Campbell, relict of the late Alex. Campbell, aged 90 years and 9 months. May she rest in peace!

CAVANAGH. — In Richmond, Ont., on 29th Dec., 1905 Mrs. Wm. Cavanagh, daughter of the late Edward Cosgrove, aged 32 years. May she rest in peace!

KENNEDY.—At Glennevis, Ont., on Nov. 28 1905, Miss Anna Kennedy. May she rest in peace!

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