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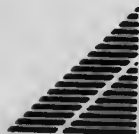
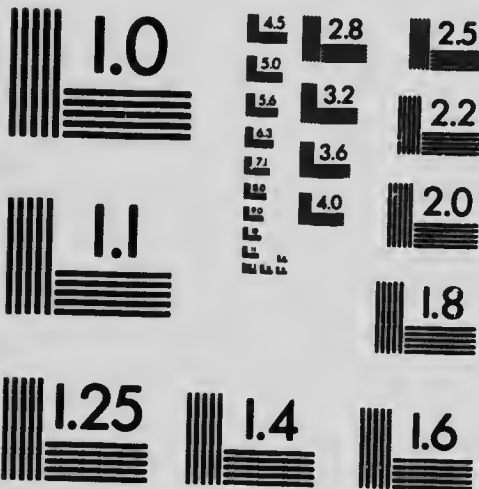
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THE DOCTRINE OF INTENTION.



AN
ARTICLE
OF FAITH
IN "THE
CATHOLIC
CHURCH."



Am I really a Catholic ?



Non adversus veritatem, sed
pro veritate.

THE DOCTRINE OF INTENTION.

.....

AMONGST the subjects which are of great importance, and yet are seldom spoken about, is the Doctrine of Priestly Intention. Let us candidly and carefully look into it according to the teaching of the Catholic Church. And first

What is meant by the Doctrine?

It is that the priest in performing his sacred duties should have the *intention* of doing what the Church has ordered. That is, that he should have his mind fixed upon the particular work in which he is engaged, considering the serious character of the sacraments and discharging his office with due solemnity. It is, that he is not to imagine himself simply performing an outward act, but exercising a sacred function for the spiritual benefit of the recipient, and consequently that he should with all sincerity really intend to do everything that is required. These objects may be considered very excellent and be regarded as evidence of the anxiety of the Church to promote the spiritual welfare of her children.

When was this Doctrine Established?

It was referred to and favourably considered in the Council of Constance held in 1415, and also in the Council of Florence, A.D., 1438 but was more definitely decided and settled as a decree of the

Church in the Council of Trent which commenced its sessions in December 1545. Considerable discussion took place in connection with it, some of the learned Divines present expressing very strong objections. This was specially the case with Catherinus Bishop of Minori, near Naples. He made an energetic protest against passing the canon. His words are these. "Consider the utter uncertainty that you are introducing into all the sacraments of our Church if you say that the priest must have the intention of doing that which the Church does, or which the Church would have to be done. Take the case, in the first instance, of a priest who has a Parish of some 4,000 or 5,000 souls under him. The people bring their children to him to be baptized, but if he be a bad priest and utterly thoughtless and without intention in the sacramental act, then they will remain unbaptized; the penitents too, that go to him for confession and absolution will remain unabsolved of sin; and a similar invalidity will attach also to his sacrifice of the mass. Nor this alone; but the uncertainty must extend further to the case of *ministerial orders*. For, supposing the candidate for ordination to have been baptized by a priest who had not a thought of doing the thing seriously, and so imparting the proper sacramental grace, then that man will not have been baptized, and consequently even though the three ordaining Bishops may, when putting their hands upon him, really *intend* to ordain him, yet the fact of his non-baptism, will vitiate his ordination,

for they cannot ordain an unbaptized man. And then moreover, supposing this apparently ordained, but not really ordained man to be in course of time, made a Bishop, he will yet by virtue of his non-baptism, and non-ordination, be no Bishop, and consequently all his subsequent acts as *Bishop* will be invalid. Hence as we trace down the results, in the progress of time it is obvious that every minister and Bishop deriving from him will be unordained and unconsecrated, and so the lines of priests that are *no priests* and Bishops that are *no Bishops* will multiply perpetually, from generation to generation even until the end of the world." In consequence of this speech of Catharinus we are told by Padre Paolo who was well acquainted with the proceedings of the Council that "other Prelates were troubled, and acknowledged that it was a most perplexing affair." However after further discussion the canon was at length passed establishing the doctrine which is therefore bound to be regarded as a matter of faith. The words of the canon translated from the Latin are

"If anyone shall say that the intention of doing, at least what the Church does, is not required in ministers, when they make and confer the sacraments, let him be accursed."

This doctrine embraces all the seven sacraments, so that each one is nul and void without the required *intention* on the part of the priest, and consequently the recipients obtain none of the spiritual benefits

which are stated to belong to the various sacraments. This is plainly asserted by writers of eminence and learning. The celebrated Cardinal Ballarmino says, "Nor can anyone be certain, with the certainty of faith, that he receives a true sacrament, since a sacrament cannot be made without the intention of the minister, and no one can see another's intentions."

But does this invalidating absence of intention ever occur? Undoubtedly it does occur at times, and it is highly probable that such cases are frequent. Any priest whilst performing his sacred office may have a sudden seizure of lumbago, rheumatism, gout, toothache, neuralgia or any other painful affection which would almost necessarily divert his attention and fix it upon the seat of pain, in which case the words of the office may be correctly repeated, but the necessary *intention* would be absent, and invalidity result.

But apart from these presumable and not unfrequent cases causing invalidity there are others of a more serious character; for however much we may deplore it, we cannot deny the fact that there have been many dissolute, worldly, and even infidel priests. What are we to say about the *intention* of such persons? Our natural and necessary conclusion must be that according to the teaching of the Church, the sacraments were vitiated and rendered invalid in hundreds of instances. Alas for the penitents and others who received the sacraments at the hands of such priests! Poor deluded souls! They thought they had the substance of the blessed sacraments but it

was only the shadow. No benefit at all could they derive, since the Church teaches us that it is only through the sacraments, *duly administered* that grace can be imparted or sin forgiven.

Some writers have tried to make it appear that there are several kinds of Intention. They speak of actual intention, external intention, implied intention, habitual intention, and virtual intention. This distinction is an ingenious way of getting out of a difficulty, and is evidently made for that purpose. But if the learned Doctors in the Council of Trent had any idea of this sort why did they not say so? They evidently used the word intention in its ordinary acceptation, and in no other meaning *a fixed purpose of the mind*. It is asserted that an *implied* intention is all that is required. If so the Fathers in the Council made "much ado about nothing," but we will give them credit for having had more sense.

An all-important question for one who considers himself to belong to the true Church is this

Am I really a Catholic?

He may say, I have been baptized, I have gone regularly to confession and have received absolution and I have many times attended Mass; but perhaps the *intention* of the priest was wanting in these sacraments. Perhaps the priest himself had not been duly ordained and if so he was only a layman. Who knows? It is impossible to find out.

I believe there is no salvation out of the true

Church; and further I believe that the true Church is the Holy Roman Apostolic Church. But if I am not a real Catholic I am not in that true Church. What then? Why, there is no salvation for me! If so I am as badly off as the Protestants whom I have always regarded as heretics, and out of the pale of salvation. As badly off? Yes I am *worse* off. Rightly or wrongly they are at any rate *free from doubt* whilst I have *nothing but doubt*. They reject the grace of the sacraments, and the efficacy of good works, asserting that faith in Christ Jesus is sufficient to secure salvation. One of their favourite texts is "He that *believeth* on the Son hath everlasting life," and another "*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Having this faith, or supposing that they have it, they are peaceful and hopeful, whilst I am unhappy and hopeless.

Protestants when they have been converted to the faith of our Church often speak of the peace of mind and assurance that they feel. This is what we might expect after they have been tossed about by the uncertainties of the numerous Sects. But they have probably never heard of the doctrine of *Intention* and so they are in happy ignorance; but a little further information would tend to disturb their minds, and rob them of their boasted assurance.

Then as to ourselves we speak of *certainty* in our Holy Church and perhaps boast a little as being in this respect far superior to all the heretical Sects, but

in consequence of the doctrine of Intention there is no certainty at all, but the utmost uncertainty. This Doctrine necessarily destroys the very foundation of certainty, so that verily we can feel sure of nothing. No Bishop even can be certain of his valid consecration, nor is there a single Priest who is sure that he was duly ordained. For anything that can be proved to the contrary, one half of our Bishops and Priests are still laymen; and the awful misery of it is that the faithful cannot discover who they are. **Oh, what a sandy foundation we are all building upon!** When I think of this wretched state of things I am almost driven to become a Protestant, although my Church has taught me to hate the very name.

I am afraid I shall turn infidel, and believe nothing at all. My confidence in Priests and Sacraments is sadly shaken, and I feel almost in despair of salvation. Alas, what am I to do?

I can only use as a prayer the oft-repeated words of his late Eminence Cardinal Newman

“Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom
Lead thou me on.”

Or better still the prayer of David “O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me.”

De profundis clamavi,

Domine, Dirige me.

Any person who may wish to re-print this tract in its completeness is at liberty to do so. The Author.



