

matter of opinion, all certainty in morals becomes impossible, and men lapse into the old-time vices of paganism.

Sometimes the good lives of unbelievers are mentioned as proof positive that belief is an unimportant factor in the regulation of conduct. A man will argue, "A never puts his foot inside a church, nor does he accept any creed whatever; yet he is a man, kindly, charitable, pure and honest. On the other hand, B is a Catholic, accepting without question every dogma and law of his Church, and I know him to be a drunkard, an adulterer, a hypocrite, the most uncharitable and contemptible of men." But this statement proves nothing at all, because the comparison is made between the open, well-known vices of a sinful, hypocritical believer, and the obvious good deeds of an amiable unbeliever. The whole character of the two men is often not adequately known, and consequently is not weighed in a true balance.

But even if we grant that a particular unbeliever is a fairly good man, his goodness is certainly not due to his unbelief. He lives in a Christian environment, he comes of Christian stock; he may perhaps have received a Christian education as a child. His life is parasitic. As Balfour writes in his *Foundations of Belief*, page 82: "Biologists tell us of parasites which live, and can only live in the bodies of animals more highly organized than they... So it is with those persons who claim to show by their example that naturalism is practically consistent with the maintenance of ethical ideals, with which naturalism has no natural affinity. Their spiritual life is parasitic; it is sheltered by convictions which belong not to them, but to the society of which they form a part; it is nourished by processes in which they take no share. And when these convictions decay, and these processes come to an end, the alien life which they have maintained can scarce be expected to outlast them."

If a man be utterly indifferent to the truth of God, if he look upon the Ten Commandments as temporary laws evolved out of the consciousness of a certain Semitic race, if he questions the fact of God's existence, makes little of the fact of immortality, denies the fact of sin, and the freedom of the will, what basis can he have for the moral law? As a lawyer, he will not hesitate to bribe both jury and judge, if he can do so without detection; as a doctor, he will not shrink from child murder or a criminal operation; as a politician, he will steal what he can from the State's treasury, and be loyal to his friends, no matter what their competence or their

morals; as a preacher of the Gospel of Christ, he will deny its every doctrine, and be at the beck and call of the rich and powerful among his hearers — a mere "seller of rhetoric," as St. Augustine called him long ago.

The true Christian may, under stress of temptation, fall into the worst vices of the pagan, and give the lie to his high profession. But no matter how low he may fall, he falls FROM A STANDARD, and you may appeal to him for amendment. He has once climbed up the mount of God, and he knows that with God's help he can again reach the summit. But if a man feels confident that every lapse is due merely to the evil of environment, a taint in the blood, or the impelling force of a stronger will, he will not answer your appeal to higher things. He calls evil good, and good evil.

Will you say that conduct is the one thing essential? You are right. But faith is the inspiration and support of right conduct. It is the very foundation stone of the supernatural life. A good man will accept God's word in its entirety, once he knows it. A good man is bound to search for the revelation of God, once he begins to doubt about the validity of his own ethical and religious convictions. It is just as much a sin to deny the known truth or to be indifferent in its search, as to commit murder or adultery.

This is a principle which the modern world has forgotten, but it will have to come back to it. It is a truth that the Catholic Church is ever trying to drive home to every heart and mind. She appeals to all men, however deluded by error or debased by sin, in a spirit of kindness, tact, sympathy and patience. But she dare not sacrifice one jot or tittle of the divine message, which Christ gave her for the healing of the nations.

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Pamphlet 642

Indifferentism

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints."

Jesus Christ did not found many religions, He founded the Roman Catholic Church, assisted by the Holy Spirit

The following is an excerpt from "The Question Box," second edition, by Fr. Bertrand L. Conway, CSP, published by the Paulist Press, New York, in 1929, with the Imprimatur of Patrick Cardinal Hayes, Archbishop of New York.

by Fr. Bertrand L. Conway

Is not one religion as good as another? Are not creeds in themselves unimportant, and conduct the one thing essential? Do we not frequently meet men who believe in Christ and all His teachings, and yet day by day do things that would bring a blush to a pagan's cheek?

One of the most common dogmas outside the Catholic Church in our day and country is the dogma of indifferentism. The indifferentist will speak patronizingly of religion as a police force to keep the discontented in check, or as an outlet for the emotions of pious sentimentalists. He will praise all religions for the virtuous men they have produced; he will maintain that intelligence and good breeding alike call for a kindly toleration towards all creeds and churches, but he will also vehemently denounce the Catholic Church as bigoted, intolerant and autocratic, because she claims obedience under sin as the infallible mouthpiece of a divine revelation. There are many roads, he informs you, leading to the Kingdom of Heaven, and an honest man may travel any one of them with the conviction that he is pleasing God.

You meet the indifferentist everywhere. In educational matters, he is a secularist who marvels greatly at the determined effort made by Catholics to educate their children in separate Catholic schools; in politics, he wants the State to ignore religion entirely, and becomes indignant when Church and State work together for the common good; in social questions, he advocates many principles subversive of Christian morality, and tells the Church to keep her hands off such questions as divorce, birth control, labor problems, and such-like issues. In religion, he believes that all creeds

are equally true and equally helpful — perhaps, down in his heart, equally false — and that their acceptance or rejection is as unimportant as the cut of a man's clothes or the customs of his peculiar nationality.

The Catholic Church condemns in most unequivocal terms this modern dogma of indifferentism. She asserts that it is the most subtle enemy of religion, harder to combat successfully than the most bitter prejudice and bigotry. A man who hates the Catholic Church because he thinks she stands for everything unintelligent, ignoble and autocratic, may be led to love her, once he learns that he has been misled by the parents he loves and the teachers he respects. A good hater like St. Paul who, as he says himself, acted “ignorantly and in unbelief,” became, after his conversion, one of the greatest lovers of Jesus Christ. But an indifferentist, who declares God indifferent to truth simply because he himself is indifferent, and who glories in a self-made religion free of all obligation and restraint, is hardly apt to consider the claims of a divine, infallible teaching Church, which requires absolute faith in all the revelation of God, and enforces her divine doctrine and law under penalty of sin.

Is it not strange, however, that the very man who worries night and day over his business troubles, and who sacrifices health and comfort in his pursuit of money, political preferment, or the interests of science, should at the same time be utterly indifferent to the truth of God? “Seek ye first the kingdom of God,” said Jesus Christ (Matt. 6:33). “What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26)

Faith and works

It is easy to trace the origin of modern indifferentism. It is the inevitable reaction from Luther's false teaching regarding justifying faith. His extreme formula, “Faith alone without works will save,” has in the minds of his descendants led to the opposite formula, “Works alone without faith will save.” Luther said: “Believe right, and I care not what you do.” His follower today says: “Do right, and I care not what you believe.”

Moreover, Luther's teaching of private judgment, which made man's reason the one supreme arbiter of the revelation of God, led naturally to indifferentism. Sixteenth century Protestantism substituted an infallible book, the Bible, for the infallible Catholic Church, but in practice the meaning of the Bible was left to the

private interpretation of the individual. Within a few years, this faulty principle gave birth to a number of contradictory versions of Christ's Gospel. How was the man in the street to know the true version from the false? Was it not inevitable that lacking the time, the inclination or the ability to study, he would soon conclude that it made no difference what a man believed?

The Catholic Church condemns indifferentism in the name of reason, of the Sacred Scriptures, and of Christian tradition. The God of indifferentism is not a God to be adored by rational men. God is Essential, Absolute and Eternal Truth; He is likewise Essential, Absolute and Eternal Holiness. A God of Truth and Holiness, He cannot be equally pleased with truth and error, with good and evil. To assert therefore that God does not care what men believe, is indeed blasphemous. A man indifferent to truth — a liar, in other words, — cannot have the respect of his fellows. A God indifferent to truth could not demand the homage of thinking men. No wonder, then, that those who formed so low a concept of the Deity finally denied Him altogether. Indifferentism is merely atheism in disguise.

The assertion that one religion is as good as another is irrational. It is a first principle of reason that two contradictory statements cannot both be true. If one is true, the other is undoubtedly false. Either there are many gods or one God: either Jesus Christ is God, or He is not; Mohammed is either a prophet or an impostor; divorce is either allowed or prohibited by Christ; the Eucharist is the living Jesus Christ, or it is mere bread.

To declare all religions equally true, or that their differences are immaterial, is to deny objective truth altogether with the pragmatist — a denial which is the curse of our age. On this theory, a man ought to change his religion as he changes the cut of his clothes, according to his environment. He ought to be a Catholic in Italy, a Lutheran in Sweden, a Mohammedan in Turkey, a Buddhist in China, a Shintoist in Japan.

Beware of false prophets

It is certainly strange that many believers in the Bible are indifferentists, in spite of its clear, explicit condemnation of this theory. Jesus Christ commanded His Apostles to teach a definite Gospel, and condemned those who knowingly rejected it. “Preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be condemned” (Mark 16:15,16). He prophesied that many would gainsay His teaching, but He denounced them in

unmeasured terms. “Beware of false prophets who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15).

Revelation, if it has any meaning, is a divine message which no one can reject without sin. We must receive it, as the Apostle says, “not as the word of men, but as it is indeed the Word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13). God, a God of Truth, could not possibly have revealed a plurality of religions, or a multitude of varying Christianities. He founded one Church, one Kingdom of God, one Sheepfold, under the perpetual and infallible guidance of Himself and the Holy Spirit.

Blessed Virgin Mary, You who have assisted the Apostles in the foundation of the Church, implore the gifts of the Holy Spirit for our Holy Mother the Church that is presently crucified in public by slanderers.

The history of Christianity in every age shows how alien to Christ is the dogma of indifferentism, which was first popularized by the English Deists and the French Rationalists of the seventeenth century. In the first three centuries, the Christian martyrs died by the thousands, rather than save their lives by a profession of indifferentism. Frequently, they were asked by friends and kinsfolk to sacrifice to the gods of pagan Rome, or at least to allow their names to be written down as having sacrificed. “What difference does it make?” asked their pagan friends. They answered in the words of Christ: “Every one, therefore, that shall confess Me before men, I will confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But he that shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32,33). They were not indifferentists.

In sixteenth-century England, many a Catholic was offered money, preferment and life, if he would but acknowledge the royal supremacy of the Tudors in things spiritual, against the constant voice of Christendom from the beginning. But men like Blessed Thomas More, Bishop Fisher and Edmund Campion gladly died for the certain teaching of Christ. They were not indifferentists.

As a matter of fact, we find that the man who says first, “It does not make any difference what a man BELIEVES” is led logically to say, “It does not make any difference what a man DOES.” His morality is built upon the shifting sands of opinion fancy, human respect, and, therefore, will not stand the stress of sorrow, disgrace, difficulty, nor temptation. If religion be a mere