

From Anglicanism to Catholicism

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"The Truth Shall Make You Free"

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"The children of them that afflict thee shall come bowing down to thee; and all that slandered thee shall worship the steps of thy feet, and shall call thee the City of the Lord, the Sion of the Holy One of Israel." —Isaiah LX., 14.

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The Objects of the Society

1. To disseminate among Catholics small and cheap devotional works.
2. To assist the uneducated poor to a better knowledge of their religion.
3. To spread among Protestants information about Catholic truth.
4. To promote the circulation of good, cheap and popular Catholic books.

Preface

It is well known that throughout the Anglican body the number of converts to the Catholic Church is yearly increasing by leaps and bounds. The annual ratio is ever expanding, and so great has it become that it is no longer possible in England to even record the principal names. Many are the reasons given by these converts for their change of faith, for "all roads lead to Rome," but it is more than likely that not a few of them have been set a-thinking very seriously by the considerations mentioned in the following pages, written by a member of the Catholic Truth Society of St. Thomas.

From Anglicanism to Catholicism

"The Truth Shall Make You Free"

From The Catholic Record, October 30th, 1897.

"Be ready always to give a reason for the hope that is in you." (1 Peter, iii, 15.) That was the burden of the sermon preached one fine Sunday morning some few years ago by my Anglican rector. He was an earnest, godly man, according to his lights. The sermon was not eloquent, but it was forceful, and made an impression upon my mind. Why was I an Anglican? I asked myself. Could I give an enquirer a precise idea of what my Church's doctrines were? And yet the question seemed absurd. Had not I listened diligently to at least six sermons per month ever since I could remember, and until I was over thirty years of age? Had I not been a Sunday school student, and, later, a teacher, for many a year? And yet here was I asking myself "what does the Church of England teach? On what grounds does she spurn the 'dissenters' and persistently combat the Catholic Church?" The more I thought of it the more I saw the necessity, nay, the duty, of complying with the apostolic injunction to be able to give a reason for the faith that was in me.

I went to my pastor, and by his instructions I set to work to master the principles of the Book of Common Prayer. How I did marvel at some of the contents of that Book, especially at the Calendar, Precepts of the Church, Rubrics, Occasional Services, and the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion! I had certainly never noticed many of these things before, nor had my attention ever been directed to them either at home, in Sunday school, or from the pulpit! So surprised was I at what I read that I asked several prominent laymen if they had ever noticed, or could explain, them. None of them could give me any assistance worth mentioning, and most of them stared at my questioning in mild amazement. In one sense I felt relieved. After all, I was not the only one who was supposed to know, but knew not the position and teachings of his Church. There were others.

But this position could not satisfy. After my surprise had somewhat abated, I determined to investigate the whole position. Evidently most of the laity did not know exactly, nor care, what their Church taught. But the clergy, I thought, would help me, nay, they would rejoice at my efforts to shake off indifference. They, at least, would have their Prayer Book doctrines at their fingers' ends. I would begin at the beginning of the book, note down every doctrine, practice, rubric, and expression which needed explanation, or seemed obscure, take this list to my pastor—who, by the way, was a Low Churchman—and ask for information. His replies to my queries were substantially as follows:

"The Prayer Book calls the Virgin Mary 'Our Lady,' but this is a relic of Popery. The same may be said of the term 'matins' for Morning Prayer. But no loyal churchman should now tolerate the revival of these Romanizing expressions. Strictly speaking, none of the saints and martyrs mentioned in our Calendar were Anglicans. They were all Catholics, and a number of them, indeed, were Popes. No doubt, however, some of them were good people in their way, and others may never have existed. It is not customary now, or useful, to keep up most of the old festivals in the Calendar, such as the Annunciation, the Purification, the Conception, and such like. The people would not attend such services anyway. I have no idea what the words 'O sapientia,' set down for 16th December, refer to; nor am I clear as to what 'Invention of the Cross' has to do with May 3rd, or 'Holy Cross Day' with 14th September; nor yet why there should be 'Feasts of the Nativity' of the Virgin Mary and John Baptist, and none similar for Paul and Peter. I doubt if one clergyman in a dozen in our Church knows the *raison d'être* of these things or pays any attention to them."

"There is also a 'Table of vigils, fasts, and days of abstinence to be observed in the year.' Perhaps it might be well to obey this, but I cannot say off-hand how you should set to work to keep either a vigil or a fast; and I do not think the Church even tells us anywhere what to 'abstain' from particularly. You must use your own judgment. Public prayers in the church are indeed ordered to be said 'daily,' and the Litany on Wednesdays and Fridays, but we have somehow given that good custom up. The banns of marriage also should be called, but the people generally won't let us obey this direction any more. Outsiders who are known to be unconfirmed, and even unbaptized, are often nowadays admitted to Holy Communion, which I must confess is a little lax; and I am aware that sextons have often been allowed to consume and even otherwise make away with what remains of the consecrated bread and wine, which is contrary to propriety and the Church's laws. I also know that the laudable practice of the 'Churching of Women,' though enjoined by the Prayer Book, has been allowed to become largely unobserved. We have, in fact, dropped these and many other good ancient Christian rules, and have, I fear, lost the art of discipline."

I had asked my pastor for bread, and he gave me this stone. I was well-nigh discouraged. I could not understand how the contents of our Book of Common Prayer could be called useless, and even wrong. Nor could I comprehend the ignorance of much of its contents displayed by one who had vowed to explain and defend it. Worse still, I was assured that the Church had "lost the art" of enforcing its own laws and doctrines! I had a whole sheaf of questions yet to propose, but concluded I would take them to another clergyman of my Church for solution, hoping for better success.

This time I encountered one who called himself "an old-fashioned High Churchman," which is much the same as saying he was a modern Broad Churchman—one who held "moderate" views. I repeated the same questions, and found he half approved and half disapproved of the whole lot. Truly he was "moderate." I had heard often of parsons who were called "safe" men, and here I found one. These matters, he said, were good in themselves, no doubt; but I got little real information. The main things, after all, I was told, were the Bible, the creeds, the historic episcopate, and peace in the Church at almost any reasonable price, based on compromise.

All this was very plausible, but it was hazy. I wanted something more definite. In answer to questions he stated that the very first rubrical directions in the Prayer Book (known as the "Ornaments Rubric") were fast causing the ruin of the Church, and bid fair to smash it. They were too "extreme"—that is to say "Popish." He admitted that the Book sanctioned auricular confession, but deprecated its revival as a general practice. He had not adopted it with his flock, nor did he intend to. In fact, his own Bishop had a horror of it, as well as of all recent revivals of the ceremonial of the time of King Edward VI. He did not pretend to be a priest himself, though the Prayer Book gave him that title, and he considered said ceremonial to be superstitious and useless. I pointed out that Article 36, which is one of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion laid down in the Prayer Book, had been solemnly subscribed to both by himself and his Bishop at their ordination, and that Article plainly declared that such ceremonial was "lawful, neither hath it anything that of itself is superstitious and ungodly;" to which he replied that very many clergymen nowadays paid little respect to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and only assented to them at ordination reluctantly, and as a matter of form, which could not well be avoided. Besides, they only bound the clergy, and I, as a layman, need not believe them unless I chose to do so!

I was getting completely bewildered by this time. It was becoming very plain that I would have to look elsewhere for a clear, connected exposition of what I was called upon to believe and uphold for

my soul's welfare. However, I ventured one or two more references to the Prayer Book, and he replied as follows:

"You are correct in saying that we are commanded to recite publicly the Creed of St. Athanasius on some fourteen chief holydays of the year, but half our congregations would bolt if we tried that. It is too Catholic, and especially some of its clauses too 'damnatory' to suit the present temper of our people. Nor could even the Bishops enforce this rule. Some of them, indeed, dislike it, and others dare not press the point, nor, in short, many other of the Church's laws."

As matters were getting more confused and complicated as I proceeded, I threw up my studies for the time being. Later on I happened across a Ritualistic clergyman. He "held forth" to me on Apostolic Succession and the Ornaments Rubric (already alluded to); to my intense amazement characterized Luther, Knox, Cranmer, Henry VIII., and other leaders of the Reformation, as "villains," and wound up with a reference to the authority of "our Holy Mother the Church of England."

I asked him a few questions also. He assured me the Church had always taught the doctrine of prayers for the dead, and when I told him that was the first I had heard of it—in fact, had always heard it condemned—he cited the following words from the Litany: "Remember not, Lord, our offences nor the offences of our forefathers, etc.," which I thought rather weak as a prayer for the dead; said the Church upheld the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and tried to explain away the "black letter" rubric which plainly and expressly declares for a "Real Absence," by saying that it was there as a result of heretical German and Swiss interference with our Church! Asked if it was right to invoke the prayers of saints and angels, he regretted that the Church had ceased to teach it, but he timidly acknowledged it was right and scriptural yet he dare not preach it yet—"milk for babes, you know," he said smilingly. And finally he admitted that the Thirty-nine Articles were a sore trial to all true churchmen, who were quite justified in regarding them as our "forty stripes, save one"—an infliction upon the long-suffering Church unaccountably permitted by God in His wisdom.

I declared it was a novel idea to me, and a trial to my faith, to be asked to believe that God permitted false doctrines to oust the true in His Church, and thus mislead a whole people for the good of that people: in fine, making God the author of sin!

He also said he used in his ministrations such accessories as candles, vestments and crucifixes. He had not adopted incense, holy water and sacred oils, as the people—and his Bishop—would not permit them, but he hoped for better times! Meantime, he counselled full reliance upon the apostolic wisdom of the grand old Church of England. True, she had her miseries, but she was all right, and as Article 20 says, she "hath authority in controversies of faith," and would doubtless settle all these points some day. I asked him if her claim to possess final authority meant something similar to the Roman Catholic doctrine, namely, that she is infallible and unable to teach what is untrue. Upon his reluctant admission that she might possibly err in so all-important a matter as eternal salvation, I pointed out that we surely ought not to be asked to stake our immortal souls on teachings that might be false, nay, were false, according to his views on some very important points in the prayer-book.

I had set out in earnest to make a study of the teachings of my Church with a view to defend her, and here was the puzzling result! Nowhere could I find reasonable certainty as to faith, yet I knew that "without faith it is impossible to please God." Nowhere could I find her ministers agreed upon all-important points. Surely I would have been justified had I said to each of them in turn, "Art thou

a master in Israel and knowest not these things?" (St. John 3, 10.) The only logical conclusion I could come to was that the Church of England was a great City of Confusion, out of which I must hasten at all costs. But where to? The other leading denominations, of which she is the mother, I found on examination to be fully as illogical and inconsistent, but mostly upon other grounds, which it would be easy to enumerate had I the space. Many of my own relatives being members of these denominations, it did not take long to discover that not one of them was quite sure just what his sect does teach, or what to think himself about sundry important doctrines. As one instance only, I could not find one who could give me a really satisfying and substantial reason why he rested from work on, and kept holy, the first day of the week instead of the seventh day, as Christ and the Apostles invariably did. Surely it is important, and an "essential" that we should know why we constantly break and ignore one of the ten solemn commandments of God delivered in tones of thunder from Mount Sinai!

What was I to do now? I could only pray to God to lead me by His "kindly light," and He did in his mercy lead me. With many qualms of prejudice and very great reluctance, I resolved to probe into the doctrines and practices of the great Catholic Church. With foolish timidity I kept away from all Catholics of every description, and confined myself to books picked up here and there. By chance I ran across a pamphlet called "Claims of Anglicanism," by Rev. Father Davis, of Madoc, Ont. I also found a very complete exposition of Catholic teachings in Di Bruno's "Catholic Belief," sold by D. & J. Sadlier & Co., Toronto. These and other authorized books of the Church were examined carefully, and after testing Catholic doctrines and practices by Scripture, history, reason and common sense, and finding them to my surprise and delight to be one beautiful, harmonious whole, I presented myself to a certain good priest for reception into the Church. To my great chagrin, I was refused. "Wait," he said; "bide your time, test further, probe deeper, make very sure, pray yet again for light and grace. Holy Church does not need you, nor even any whole nation or race, but all men need her, and when you are quite certain that nothing more remains to be said, and your faith and humility of heart are become as pure and child-like as possible, she will lovingly clasp you to her maternal bosom."

I waited, and prayed, and studied, finding new harmonies, new treasures, every day, and eventually had the great happiness of entering safely the One True Fold. It may be contended that some of the discrepancies I noticed between Anglican teaching and practice are small matters. Perhaps so, but others of them are of supreme importance, and still others I have since discovered, beside which, those already mentioned, are mostly of minor account. Hence, I have often wondered how I could have so long failed to observe at least the more glaring ones, and can only plead that I, in common with most Protestants, took everything for granted to such an extent that my eyes were, like Saul's, bedimmed with scales of prejudice. Old friends, while giving me credit for sincerity, predicted that after a short experience in the Catholic Church I would speedily retrace my steps. On the contrary, I found that "the half had not been told me," and that, like the painted windows, she was even more beautiful from within than from without: and I can thankfully testify that I have never had one single doubt, because I could never discover one single flaw. I found her a "glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." (Eph. v. 27). Some bad Catholics I found, indeed, but even they cling to her skirts, and she, in her motherly mercy, does not cast them off, praying and hoping for their repentance. But the masses of her children, from the prince to the son of toil, know in whom and in what they believe, and are struggling to serve God, amid trials and persecutions, in every tribe, and tongue and nation. The so-called "yoke of the Catholic Church" I found to be easy,

and its burden light. Instead of servile bondage I found liberty, and was at last enabled to appreciate the saying of our Lord, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (St. John, 8, 32.)

The pamphlets of the Catholic Truth Society are but brief, simple aids towards the removal of prejudice regarding Catholicity. They cover all the leading points of doctrine and practice. Single copies 5 cents, mailed free; any seven by mail 25 cents. Send for Catalogue. More complete instruction can be found in "Faith of Our Fathers," 50 cents; "Catholic Belief," 40 cents; "Plain Facts for Fair Minds," 15 cents, to be had of Thomas Coffey, Catholic Record, London, Ont., or of the Secretary, Catholic Truth Society, St. Thomas, Ont.
