

GOD IN THE WORLD

James Kelly

WHILE Jim McCarthy was in bed with his broken leg the Canon got into the habit of calling in to see him a couple of times a week, and the two became great friends. One day when the Canon walked into the bedroom he found Jim reading. The boy looked particularly pleased when he saw who his visitor was.

"Canon," he said, "I've come up against a difficulty in this novel I'm reading. Could you help me out?"

"I'll do what I can for you, though I'm very far from being infallible," said that Canon.

Jim showed him the book he was reading. "This author is talking about a man who was on the point of becoming a Catholic. He says the Church attracted him because it offered an easy path in which no fighting would be needed.' In the end, however, he didn't enter the Church because, according to this writer, he saw that submitting to the power of Pope and bishops amounted to giving up personal responsibility 'for the sake of selfish freedom from personal danger.' By that he means, I suppose, that we Catholics let other people do our religious thinking for us because we're too scared to risk doing it ourselves. How could I answer that?"

"That's a common enough objection to the Church." said the Canon. It takes different forms. I remember one time a man told me that all Catholics had sold their souls to the Pope. He had hold of the same wrong idea of what Catholic obedience means as your novelist friend. But you should be able to answer him yourself. You're a Catholic. Do you find it so easy to live your religion that no fighting is needed?"

CATHOLICS ARE SHEEP?

"I certainly don't," said Jim, "I sometimes wish I did ! But look Canon, when this man talks about fighting, he doesn't exactly mean struggling to keep straight and lead a decent life. He's trying to say that we close our eyes and take another man's word for what's right and wrong, for what to believe and what not to believe. He implies that when we follow the instructions of the Pope or the bishops we are behaving like sheep."

"That's his meaning all right," the Canon admitted, "but as I said, he doesn't rightly understand what obedience means for a Catholic. You see, there are two kinds of obedience. There's the weak, servile, sneaking sort that he is talking about. You've seen that kind of obedience yourself in some of the lads at school and I'm sure you haven't liked it."

"Do you mean the sort of fellow who is always playing up to the masters?"

"Exactly," said the Canon. "He wants praise and protection and he sacrifices his self-respect to get them. He's a toady. Your novelist is saying that a Catholic obedience to the Church authorities is of that kind, and therefore he concludes that Catholics are afraid of responsibility and want to have all their decisions made for them."

"When you put it that way, it certainly sounds a pretty ridiculous suggestion."

"I'm glad you agree. You see, obedience isn't necessarily servile, and in fact it never should be. It isn't physical force that makes us obey the Church, but the force of our own convictions. Of course it's true that no matter how strong our convictions are, we wouldn't be able to live up to them if the grace of Christ didn't help us. Christ tells us that without His help we can do nothing in the Christian life. With that grace at work in us we freely choose to obey because we know that it is God's will we should. Not every fellow keeps the rules in school because he wants to stand well with the authorities, or because he's afraid of being caught and punished. The best type of lad will make himself keep a rule by a cold, deliberate act of his own will. That's true obedience—to will to obey."

"We are always being told that's the way we should treat the rules," said Jim, "but it isn't easy. I may as well admit that pretty often I just fall in with what the rest of the fellows are doing."

"I know it isn't easy," said the Canon. "It takes a strong character and independence of will to do the hard thing we know is our duty, especially if our friends are taking the easy way out, and laugh at us as oddities for being different from them."

"It looks as if we've turned the tables on this fellow," said Jim with satisfaction, snapping his book closed. "He maintained that when we submitted to authority in the Church we were behaving like a herd of weak-minded sheep. We've proved that it's just the opposite, that we make a clear decision based on reason."

BLIND OBEDIENCE

"Not so fast." The Canon smiled and settled himself better into his chair. "Now that we have raised this matter of authority and obedience, we had better thresh it out to the bitter end. Isn't it a fact that on the most important problems in our lives we have our minds made up for us by the Pope? When the Pope defines a dogma or makes a law on some religious matter, we have to fall into line with what he says whether we like it or not. Haven't we blindly to accept his word, no matter what our reason may tell us to the contrary? And when we do give in to him are we not behaving like sheep?"

Jim was bewildered for a moment to find the Canon playing Devil's Advocate with such skill. "That's hardly a fair way of putting it," he protested. "For one thing, the Church never asks us to believe anything that's not true, much less self-contradictory or absurd. We may not be able to see for ourselves that a particular teaching is true, but at least we're always certain that it can't be proven false. And it isn't true that our obedience is blind. We believe the Pope because we know that he is infallible. God won't let him teach false doctrine. It's really God that we believe, speaking through the Pope, and it's the most reasonable thing in the world to take God's word for the truth of something, even though we can't see it for ourselves."

Jim was rather pleased with himself for having his answer so pat, but the Canon hadn't finished with him yet. He changed his ground a little.

WE THINK FOR OURSELVES

"Answer me this one," he said. "Isn't it unreasonable to claim_ that God, who gave each man a reason and a will to direct his own life with, would set up a man to whose decisions all other men would have to bow? If God set up the Pope to do our thinking for us, why did He give us minds of our own at all?"

"Well, it's only in some things that the Pope is infallible. Most things we have to think out for ourselves."

The Canon pounced. "Your right to say that the Pope's infallibility is limited to certain matters. You're wrong to say that we have to think out most things for ourselves. In a very true sense we have to think out everything for ourselves."

"But Canon, suppose our opinion is different from what the Pope has defined. Suppose we can't see by our reason that he is right. I'm sure that has happened. If a man thinks a thing out for himself and comes to a conclusion contrary to that of the Pope—what is he to do?"

"A man in that position has to choose one of two paths." The Canon was speaking carefully and weighing his words. "He may submit, or it may happen that he leaves the Church. If he submits, he has to hold tight to his faith in the Pope's infallibility, and decide that his reasoning must be mistaken somewhere, even though he can't see where; for if the Pope is right he must be wrong. That is a fearful trial for any man and a fearful power that the Church has, Jim. She can go inside a man's mind and oblige him to think in his own person according to her directions. If any human authority tried to exercise a power like that on men's minds it would be violation. But it is God who speaks through the Church. We may argue with men, but when it is God we are dealing with we can only humble our minds and believe."

The Canon had spoken with great intensity, and now he sat for a few moments in silence. Then he took up the conversation again. "One thing we can be sure of. If God does send a trial like that He also sends the grace to take a man through it in decency and honour. He won't ask anybody to be dishonest or to cheat himself or to be a coward in the face of difficulties."

"Now that is exactly the point of objection in this novel," said Jim. "This writer thought that submission to power like the Pope's couldn't be anything but unmanly."

"You have it there all right," replied the Canon. "But when Jesus Christ gave that power to St. Peter and his successors

He knew all about what was in man. He couldn't and He wouldn't have set up a power that by its very nature would destroy the freedom which God himself gave man to mark him off from the animals. When a person raises objections against the Church's power over our minds and hearts he's really afraid to trust Our Lord. He's saying in effect that Christ didn't know what he was doing."

APOSTATES

"Well, that's that disposed of," said Jim, "but what about the man who thinks he can't stay in the Church? Suppose a man decides that what the Church teaches just can't be true, and so he gives up his belief and leaves. What about him?"

"You're certainly setting up the hard ones for me today, Jim. But let's remind ourselves of the facts. Can the Church teach what is untrue?"

"I think the Catechism answer would be useful here," said Jim, "The Church cannot err when it teaches doctrines of faith and morale to be held by all the faithful."

"I'm glad to see that your courses in apologetics and social science and all the rest of it haven't driven the Catechism out of your head yet. Well, then, the Church cannot be teaching an untruth on some matter in regard to which she binds us with all her authority."

"But," persisted Jim, 'could a Catholic not be mistaken and think, for instance, that some teaching of the Church was contradicted by science. When non-Catholics disagree with us we normally assume that they are in good faith. Could a Catholic not argue himself into the same position by mistaken reasoning?"

"It does sometimes happen," replied the Canon, "that a man thinks his reason forces him to leave the Church. Tragedies like that are almost unknown in our country, thank God, but not quite so rare on the Continent or in England or America.

"Our religion is true, its truth is guaranteed by God Himself, and therefore no other truth can conflict with it, and no true reasoning can lead us to reject it. Your difficulty is that you think it might be possible for a man to lose the Faith, either because his reasoning is based on false information or because through his information is true, he draws the wrong conclusions from it, but through no fault of his own, through a mistake for which he is not to blame."

"That is the point I was trying to make all right," Jim answered.

"The short answer is that it is not possible. Any man who loses the Faith is to blame for it himself. You'll see why I say that if you think of what the Faith is. It is a grace given us by God to enable us to believe what He has revealed. It is the most important grace that God gives to men, because without it, as St. Paul says, 'it is impossible to please God.' God does not simply give us Faith and leave us on our own to make the best we can of it. He gives each man whatever help he needs to keep his Faith, and if anybody loses it, it can only be because he has refused to accept this help from God. That doesn't mean that it's easy, or that a good Catholic should never have any difficulties. I would go so far as to say that difficulties about the Faith might be a trial sent directly from God to test a man and thereby make him holier. As Cardinal Newman said, a thousand difficulties don't make one doubt, and it's only a doubt or an outright denial that is a sin against Faith."

"Well, Canon, what is the best way to deal with these difficulties against Faith?"

"What's the best way to deal with any temptation?"

"I suppose we should pray for strength to get the better of it."

"Of course we should. And if a man's prayer is humble and sincere, God will give him that grace. Often a teaching of the Church gives a man difficulty, not because he has genuine intellectual objections to it, but because the books he reads or the people he associates with have gradually implanted the notion in his head that it is 'unenlightened' or out of date. His real difficulty is not intellectual at all, but moral, the moral difficulty of pride. Arguments won't cure that, at least not permanently. But if he gets down on his knees and says 'Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner,' and means it, then he sees himself as he really is, opens up his mind to the possibility that he is mistaken, and so puts himself in the right disposition to accept God's help. If on the contrary he insists that he will stand on his own feet and demands that God's arrangements must conform to his notions of what is proper, he is refusing help from God and he will fall. He allows his thinking to be

blinded by pride and to do that is to act against his conscience. I can easily imagine that such a man would not be aware that he was acting against his conscience, but that very lack of awareness is due to his neglect of humble prayer. It is his fault, and a very serious sin. He has sinned against the light, against the promptings of the Holy Ghost, and no sin is more strongly condemned by Our Lord than that.

"It has happened too, several times over the past centuries, that new scientific discoveries seemed to some people to make belief in Christianity impossible. But always it has turned out, either that there was no real contradiction, or that as time went on and science progressed, the first statements of the discovery had to be modified, so that the contradiction disappeared. It has also happened that the efforts to settle conflicts between science and religion has given to the Church a better understanding of her own beliefs and theories that in earlier days would have been considered hostile to Catholic truth, are seen to be really in harmony with it."

"Well, suppose we take the case of this man who has brought himself to believe that Catholicism is false. What is he to do?"

"It would be wrong for such a man," replied the Canon, "to pretend that he still believes in the Church. He has already sinned through neglecting God's grace. But if he kept up the pretence of being a Catholic that would be hypocrisy, and he would be acting against his conscience a second time. If he really believes that the Church is false, then he must leave the Church."

"I say," said Jim, "that's a pretty grim sentence—to say that a man must follow his conscience even if it takes him outside the Church."

"In the last analysis, Jim, a man has no other guide. The Church insists that no man obey her unless he thinks that's the right thing to do. And of course you see how this affirmation of a man's duty to follow his conscience shows once again how false it is to say that Catholics are forbidden to think for themselves. '

"I must say," said Jim, "that as far as I can see most Catholics don't do an awful lot of thinking about whether their religion is right or not. They just take it for granted that what they learned in the Catechism or what the priest tells them is true."

SENT BY CHRIST

"In that they are no different from most people of other religions, or of no religion at all. But whereas non-Catholics take their religious opinions from men who are as liable to be mistaken as themselves, the Catholic knows that his teachers are doing the same job as the Apostles, and have the same powers. Our Lord told the apostles that whoever listened to them was listening to Him, and the same thing is true today of the Pope and bishops. and of the priests and lay teachers who work under them. The ordinary Catholic who believes without question what the priest tells him about his religion is believing Christ. Its true that an individual priest or bishop might be mistaken, but the infallible Church will soon step in and make the matter clear.

"That a striking idea," said Jim. "It certainly sobers me up when the notion drives home that when I hear Canon McGurk preaching at second Mass on Sunday, it's really in Our Lord's person he's speaking."

Canon McGurk became very serious. "It is a sobering thought for me too." he said. "Any man who preaches the Gospel is continually seeing the great and terrible truths he affirms rising up in judgment on himself. But there's no escaping the fact that that is how it is. The bishop sent me here to preach the Gospel, and it was the Pope who sent the bishop and the Pope and all the bishops can trace their authority back, one generation sending another, to the day when Christ said to St. Peter and the other apostles, who were the first Pope and the first bishops, 'Going therefore teach ye all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days, even to the end of the world.'"

The Canon drew breath, and there was silence for a few moments while the old man and the boy turned over their private thoughts. Jim was the first to speak.

When you come to think of it," he said, "unless Our Lord had stayed on earth Himself he couldn't have spread the

Gospel except by giving some men authority to teach in His name and to pass on their authority to others after them. If he had just left it to chance, his message would have got mixed up with all kinds of exaggerated stories in no time. Even the Gospels by themselves aren't enough, because different men understand them in altogether different ways."

The Canon nodded with satisfaction. "Christ came on earth to earn us a right to heaven and to teach us how to get there. The truths he had to teach were so important that he said "He that believeth not shall be condemned, meaning, of course, 'he that disbelieves through his own fault.' Christ brought many truths that men could never have found out for themselves, God had to tell them. And we could never know them or have certain faith in them unless He sent messengers to us to tell us, and unless we had assurance that the messengers were really from Him. If you read the Acts of the Apostles you'll find accounts of sermons that St. Peter or some of the others preached, always very simple. They went something like this. 'Jesus Christ was the Son of God, sent to save the people from their sins. But you, his people, turned your backs on him, and in the end you killed him. Then God raised him from the dead and set him at his right hand in glory in heaven. We are witnesses to all that. Have faith and repent and be baptized so that you may have a place in his kingdom.'

Jim was very struck by this. "And you were sent to us to bring us the same message. We know that we can believe you because the Church sent you, and Christ promised the Church that he would always be with her. It's certainly a great help to know that when you tell us such-and-such a thing is a sin.' or 'You ought to do this rather than that,' it might as well be Our Lord himself who is speaking. If we could remember that all the time I don't suppose anybody would ever sin."

OBEDIENCE HELPS US

"Ah, I'm afraid there would still be men sinning Jim. Look at Judas. Look at St. Peter himself. They sinned right in the face of Christ. But it surely is a great help, and help we badly need to know that when the Church commands or forbids, it is the Word of God Himself that commands or forbids. But notice that generally it's not the fact that a thing is forbidden that makes it wrong. It is really the other way round. It's because a thing is a sin that it's forbidden. Murder and stealing are not sins because Christ through the Church, says we mustn't do them, but we're forbidden to do them because they're wrong in themselves. However when a man is faced with a strong temptation to do wrong, it's a greater help to him to think that this wrong act will hurt Jesus who is his friend, then that it will break some sort of abstract moral law. Some pagan philosophers worked out pretty well what was right and wrong for men, but a philosopher never converted so much as the street as he lived in. We need certain commands, given with authority, and it's the Church that has that."

MORE TROUBLE

A worried look crossed Jim's face when he saw the stage their discussion had got to.

"Canon," he said, "here we are praising the Church for being able to give us sure and unmistakable knowledge of what God's law is. Are we not leaving ourselves open to the old objection all over again? I mean, could a non-Catholic not argue that the Church attracts men because she lays down the law so firmly, and gives them a comfortable assurance of where they stand, with no effort needed on their part?"

"If a man is assured he's on the road to Hell, it will hardly make him comfortable, Jim. It is of course true that peace of mind and the settling of doubts is an attraction for men. Our Lord meant it to be. That doesn't mean that Catholics have no effort to make, as you well know. For one thing, every Catholic is expected to have whatever reasonable understanding of the Church's teaching is appropriate to his education, and the getting of that knowledge can demand great effort and searching of soul."

Jim was apparently satisfied with this final explanation of the Church's right to obedience, but having once got the Canon in good talking form he was anxious to keep him going. So he came up quickly with another problem.

ALL RELIGIONS ARE THE SAME

"Look Canon," he said, "you know that there are very many Protestants living in this area. I get about with some of

them pretty regularly, and sometimes we get into arguments about religion. They are always saying that one religion is as good as another. 'Let each one live according to his own beliefs,' they say, 'and not interfere with his neighbours.' Now what's the proper answer to make to that?

"You know yourself Jim that it is not true that one religion is as good as another. Our Lord came on earth to redeem us and to found a Church in which we could get a share in his Redemption. If any religion at all is as good as the one He founded, then it looks as if He wasted his time founding a Church."

"I know that Canon," said Jim, "but you have to admit that even people who have never heard of the Church can be saved sometimes. so it doesn't seem to matter what we believe or do we are honestly convinced that we are right."

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The Canon scratched his jaw thoughtfully. "I'm trying to decide what would be the best place to start explaining. Maybe this will do. We've been throwing this word 'Church' about a good deal—the Catholic Church, 'one church is as good as another,' and so on. It's about time we settled exactly what a church is, so that we'll be able to see better what's to be gained by belonging to the one true Church rather than to some other organization that only thinks it's a Church. What would you say that the Church is?"

"That's hard to answer," said Jim, rather taken aback by the unexpectedly simple question. 'I mean, I know what the Church is of course, but it's hard to put it into words.'

"You quoted a catechism answer for me a while ago," prompted the Canon. "Can you not remember what the catechism says about the church?"

"Oh," Jim exclaimed, "I have it now. **THE CHURCH IS THE VISIBLE SOCIETY FOUNDED BY CHRIST HIMSELF, TO CONTINUE ON EARTH HIS WORK OF TEACHING, RULING AND SANCTIFYING MEN FOR THEIR ETERNAL SALVATION.'**

THE CHURCH'S PURPOSE

"Good man," said the Canon. "Now let's take that answer and see what we can make of it. Remember that we're trying to find out what it is that makes the true Church better than any other, despite the fact that men can be saved who apparently have never had anything to do with the true Church. Now what did the answer say is the purpose of the Church? What did Our Lord set up a Church for at all?"

"The Church is to carry on Our Lord's work by teaching the truths that He taught, by laying down the laws of conduct that He made, and by making men holy. And the purpose of all that is that men may save their souls."

"Very well put," commended the Canon. "Now take first of all the teaching of the truths that Christ taught. He taught them to enable men to save their souls, and the Church teaches them for the same reason. But it's only the true teaching of Christ that will help men to save their souls, and not some mistaken notion of what He taught. And it's only in the true Church that you get the whole of Christ's true teaching. Other Churches may have more or less of it, but because the Catholic Church is infallible she has kept it all, and has kept it pure. It isn't impossible for heretics to be saved, since if their heresy isn't their own fault God won't hold them accountable for it. But they miss a great deal of the help that Our Lord intended men to get from the truths He taught."

"And I suppose that the same thing is true about the laws that Our Lord laid down for us," Jim broke in. "If a man breaks Christ's law unknowingly, he's not to blame. But through the Church, Catholics get a proper knowledge of his laws and that means we have a great help towards salvation that other people miss."

"Precisely. And you'll see better just how that is so if you recall what I said a while back about the reasons why God makes laws commanding us to do this or forbidding us to do that. Things aren't made right or wrong, I said, by the fact that they are commanded or forbidden. It's the other way round. A thing is good and necessary and therefore God commands us to do it. Another thing is harmful and therefore He forbids it. So by following the Church's laws we do what is good for us and avoid what would do us harm. Non-Catholics may do what is evil in the belief that it is good, and they

won't be guilty of any crime in God's eyes. But just the same the evil that they do is real, and it harms them. It makes them less like what God wants all men to be."

Jim nodded his assent.

"In the same way when the Church orders us to do something, for instance to assist at Mass on Sundays or to go to Confessions and Communion at least once a year. it is because doing that will make us more like God wants us to be.

HOLY COMMUNION

To be more like what God wants man to be, is to be holier, and the sacraments are the great means of making men holy. Here's another thing too. For us, trying to be holy means trying to imitate Our Lord, trying to want the things He wants, to reject what He rejects. That is to say we try to unite our wills to His. It is Holy Communion above all else that does that for us. Remember what Christ said : 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives continually in me and I in him . . . He who eats me will live, in his turn, because of me.' Holy Communion unites us to Christ so closely that it is his Spirit which is the principle of the supernatural life in us. It gives us the help we need to follow Christ's will rather than our own. No matter how well-intentioned non-Catholics are, they haven't got that help towards godliness.

IT'S EASIER IN THE CHURCH

Jim thought it was time they had a little summing-up. He said "So all that we've been saying amounts to this: the true Church, which is the Catholic Church, is better than any other, because Our Lord equipped it with all the tools it needs to do a Church's job, that is, to make men holy so that they may get to Heaven. Other so-called churches are working with defective equipment, so as a rule they do their work rather badly, if at all. It's much easier to be saved in the true Church than in any other."

The Canon pursed his lips. "It's easier to be saved in the Church' He was clearly doubtful. "You see, there's so much truth in that statement that I can't really disagree with it, and yet by itself it could be misleading. It doesn't say enough. If we are going to understand properly the part of the Church in men's salvation, we'll have to work out first of all what exactly being saved means. What about a question-time on salvation?"

BEING SAVED

Jim nodded his agreement.

"Well, an easy question to start with. What are we saved from?"

"We're saved from hell—and from the devil and from sin." "Good. And what are we saved for?"

"For heaven, to be happy in heaven for ever."

"Good again. And whom are we saved by?"

"By Our Lord, when he died for us."

"Perfect. And how did it come about that we needed to be saved at all?"

"Well, Adam sinned and his sin was passed on to all his descendants, so that no men could enter heaven when they died.

Then Our Lord became man and his death on the Cross wiped out Adam's sin and opened Heaven for us. Being saved means getting a share in the merits and forgiveness of sins that Christ won for us on the Cross. Christ alone could save us because He was both God and man."

"Hold on a minute," the Canon interrupted. "How is it that Christ was able to wipe out Adam's sin and all our sins? They weren't His sins. If you do something in school that deserves punishment, will the master beat some other fellow instead of you, if another fellow offers himself?"

"No," Jim replied, "No, I shouldn't think so. Not if he knows that the other fellow had nothing whatever to do with the mischief I was at."

"And yet," persisted the Canon, "God allows his Son to suffer for our sins and accepts his sufferings in satisfaction for

our sins, and so makes friends with us again. Is that not the same as if the master in school beat the boy beside you for your misdeeds?"

ADAM'S SIN

Jim thought he saw a way of explaining the difficulty.

"It's not a matter of the personal sins of an individual," he suggested, "it's Original sin, Adam's first sin. He represented all men, and so his sin was passed on to all of us. In the same way Our Lord became man so that He could represent all men on the Cross. The merits that He won on the Cross could be passed on to all men in just the same way as the guilt of Adam's sin could be passed on to us all."

OUR SINS

"I'll let that pass for the moment, as far as Original Sin is concerned," the Canon conceded. "Remember that the exact way Adam's sin and Christ's merits passed to us is a mystery. We don't fully understand it. But what about Actual Sins, the sins for which you and I are personally responsible? Christ could wipe out Original Sin because it was the sin of the human race as a whole, and He was the representative of the race. He was truly man, and therefore could represent men. But there are other sins that He also wiped out on the Cross. personal sins. yours and mine. How could He represent you and me as individuals, when He wasn't you or I?"

BAPTISM

This time Jim saw no way out.

"That's a mystery too," he offered, not very hopefully.

'You're right, the Canon congratulated him, and when all is said and done, a mystery it will remain. We don't know how it is that Christ can share His merits with us, but the fact is that He does so. We know, because He has told us. And the fact that He does so means that in this respect God treats you and me and all other Christians as though we were Christ.

Why does God do so? Here we come to the very heart of this mystery. Because in fact we are Christ, we are "members" of His Body. It was Baptism that made us "members" of Christ. In one of his letters St. Paul says "We too, all of us, have been baptised into a single body" (I Cor, 12 :13), and the Lord Himself said "Unless a man is born again of water and the Holy Ghost, (that is, unless he is baptised), he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." (John 3 :5). The reason he cannot enter the Kingdom of God is that he hasn't got the necessary share of Christ's merits by baptism. Baptism enables us to get forgiveness for all our sins. It, itself, washes away whatever sin is on the soul when it is received, and it enables us to get absolution in Confession for sins we may commit afterwards. It is the gateway to all the Sacraments."

"I want to make sure now that I've picked up what you've been saying, Canon, before we go any further. This is the way I understand it. Because of Original Sin, and also because of our own personal sins, none of us on our own can ever get to heaven. We need to be saved from our sins and the only person that can save us is Jesus Christ, As the notice-board of the Baptist church down the road says 'There is no other name under Heaven whereby we may be saved.' He saves us by giving us a share in the merits He won on the Cross, and that share comes to us only through baptism, by which we are made members of his Church." He stopped and gave the Canon an inquiring look, to see if he had any comment to make.

"Perfectly correct, Jim. I'll just add a word or two to that. It is the firm teaching of the vast majority of Catholic theologians that no unbaptized person, no matter how good his life, will enter heaven, unless by some special and extraordinary act of God's grace. You see Heaven is not a reward that any man at all can earn by leading a good life. Heaven is a reward that God gives to his children who are brothers of Jesus Christ, made members of Christ's Body, the Church, by baptism, and who lead a good life by the help of his grace. Heaven is a supernatural reward, and the only way we can get in contact with the supernatural is through the Church, by baptism. Besides the baptism of water of course, we have the baptism of blood that joins an unbaptized martyr to the Church in death, or the baptism of desire which can take

a convert under instruction to heaven, even though he dies before he is actually baptized. The essential thing is that by baptism in some form a man gets a share of the supernatural life which Christ communicates to his Church, and by which alone he can live the life of the blessed in heaven, seeing and knowing God as He is in Himself.

The good pagan who through no fault of his own dies in ignorance of the faith, is not of course punished in any way for what he could not help. His good life earns him the great reward of a happy life in Limbo for ever.

Now, Jim my boy, I think it's time we started to draw the loose ends of our argument together, because I'll soon have to be going. Do you remember what it was that started us off on this talk about the nature of salvation?"

Jim thought for a moment. "Oh yes. It was when I said that it was easier to be saved in the Church than outside it, because in the Church we are helped to become holy by true doctrines, good laws, and by the Mass and the sacraments. You suggested it wasn't enough to say that it was easier to be saved in the Church and you started to explain by asking what salvation meant."

The Canon assented, and gathered himself for a final driving home of his point. "Now do you see why it's not enough to content yourself with the statement that it is easier to be saved in the Church? If we said no more than that we'd be leaving out the fact that no salvation at all comes to any man except through the Church. The Church is an indispensable part of God's plan for our salvation."

Jim caught sight of the novel he had been reading when the Canon came in. It reminded him how the whole talk had started. Pointing it out to the Canon he remarked : "We've come a long way since this fellow started us off. 'Catholics are just sheep, running away from responsibility, afraid to think.' Wasn't that what he said?"

"Yes, and we answered him by pointing out that in obeying the Church and accepting what she teaches us about religion, it's not to men we're giving in, but to Christ, to God, and we can surely trust ourselves to Him. And we showed that in fact the Church's authority doesn't do violence to any man's conscience. No man may accept the Church's authority unless his conscience tells him to do so. After that we went on to talk about what makes the Church superior to other religions. Could you put into two sentences for me now what that superiority rests on?"

"It rests on God, because all that the Church does is done by His power. I suppose that puts it in one sentence. God may give grace to individuals who belong to other religions, but that grace comes to them through the Church, not through their own religions."

GOD IN THE WORLD

"Hold on to that truth Jim, and never forget it. That's what I want you to take away from this talk and to keep. What the Church does, as Church, Jesus Christ does. Whether she teaches or makes laws or says Mass or administers the sacraments, she does it by His power and in order to carry on His work. She doesn't exist for herself, but only for Him. Whenever we make contact with the Church we make contact with Jesus Christ. It's she who gives us Christ. And remember too that she never gives Christ to us better than when she gives us His Cross." "What do you mean, Canon?" Jim asked.

"You'll find Jim that there are things in the Church, though not of the essence of the Church that you won't like. You may dislike an individual priest. It may even be that a priest does you injury. You may do something that justly earns you a rebuke, and you won't like taking it. So long as the Church is on earth she is full of imperfections and they pain us, just as our own imperfections cause pain to others. Never let the imperfections and the pain blind you to what the Church is in her inmost nature. She is Christ working in the world, and Christ must always carry His Cross.

There's a verse of an Irish poem I read a long time ago. and I don't think it would do any harm to remember it:

*'Gabh do laimh,
Gan tabhairt gutha ar fhear ghraid;
Ce dheanadh feat gat-la de,
Leig don Chorp bhios ina lamb.'*

You might translate it like this :

'Go to Communion

Without finding fault with the man in orders

Though he should do you every evil

Yield to the Body in his hand.'

Don't take that to mean that you must give in to a priest on every matter. But let it remind you that behind all the externals of the Church there is Jesus Christ, God in the world, and to reach him we must accept the externals.

GOLDEN WORDS

And now that I have given you one quotation, I'll cap it with another, and then I'll take my leave of you. It's from a book that was written fifteen hundred years ago by St. John Chrysostom. 'Chrysostom' means 'golden mouthed,' and he was so called because of the eloquence of his speech. Here then is the advice that St. John of the Golden Mouth gave about the Church :

Do not separate yourself from the Church! No power is as powerful as she. The Church is your hope; the Church is your salvation; the Church is your refuge. She is higher than heaven and bigger than earth. She never ages, and her vitality is eternal.'

The Canon picked up his hat and prepared to leave. "I'll slip out quietly," he remarked. If your mother heard me she'd want to be making tea. I'll drop in again in a day or two to see how you are getting on."

Then he was gone, and in a moment Jim heard the noise of the outside door closing. The Canon had apparently been successful in evading Mrs. McAuley's tea-pot.
