

could understand. On the other hand, this could not be said of other things that children learn about, such as fairies and Father Christmas, which they have to cast off at some time or other. Now for a Catholic any simplification for children, similar to that which is made in history classes, is regarded as temerarious, and some would say intolerable. Hence we use catechisms which may indeed be doctrinally accurate, but which children find it difficult to understand, apart from being rather unappealing. They do not absorb anything which can develop with them as they grow older. There are various suggested alternatives and supplements to the catechism which try to accommodate the Church's teaching to the child's intelligence but which fall into the category of the 'things-we-cast-off-when-we-get-older'. What is needful, I think, is the kind of simplified teaching which is patient of complexification later, of being assumed into a more subtle and complex pattern.

In this article I have described my method of coping with this problem. I try to create images, and seed-ideas which will grow as the children grow, and develop into a life of Christian faith. It is not for me to decide, and in any case it is too early to decide, whether this method fulfills these requirements. I think it does, but I should be grateful for the opinions of readers.

Catholics and Friends

HELEN CAMPBELL

In Northern Ireland, where I have grown up and lived and worked, the barriers separating Catholics and Protestants have made any kind of constructive encounter between them almost impossible. In the late 1950's there were some signs here and there that a few Protestants and Catholics were at least prepared to look at one another over the fences of deep-seated fear and distrust, but the winds of change had not then begun to blow. In the last brief year or two the God-given inspiration of Pope John has breathed its influence on a world of Christian people ready to listen. to try to understand and to accept a new attitude of mind and spirit.

Interest in Catholicism was 'in the air'. This interest for me has gone far back into the days of my childhood. About 2½ years ago it came to a focal point when I decided to try to find out something of the attitudes towards and knowledge of Catholicism among members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to which I belong.

I asked myself just what does our tiny group of religious people know of the great Catholic Church? How do we feel towards her teaching and her people? What makes for a creative encounter?

I decided to send a questionnaire to a limited number of Quakers whom I knew personally in England, Ireland and the United States. They were asked to pass it on to others. My hope was to get back a sufficient number of replies to give some indication, however faint, of trends of thought among Friends.

Within two and a half months I received 350 replies to the questionnaire and a great many personal letters. This material I found fascinating in its variety and vitality. It will be possible to give here only the points which stood out most clearly. Where quotations are given without any reference they have been taken directly from the replies to the questionnaire or from letters I received.

The first four questions were designed to bring out the extent of the knowledge and experience of Quakers regarding Catholics and Catholicism. It came as a surprise to find that not only have almost all who answered known Catholics personally, but the great majority have in some way discussed religion with them, have attended mass, and have read books about religion by Catholic authors, the early mystics as well as modern writings. Friends and Catholics have lived as neighbours and have met as fellow-workers, in factories, schools and colleges. Some went to convent schools as children, others have married into Catholic families. A few have followed study courses on Catholicism, or taken 'Instruction' but gone no further. Two who wrote to me about the questionnaire have become Catholics. I had not expected that so many Friends (about 70% of those who replied) would have these close personal contacts with the Catholic Church. There are indeed Friends who have been deeply and sincerely attracted to Catholicism. 'Discussion of religion has not been easy'. 'Many Catholics are reticent and shrink from discussion'; 'It is difficult to discuss religion because the Catholic mind works on quite different lines from ours'. Several Friends commented that it is easy to discuss religion with those who have been converted to the Catholic Church. One Friend writes, 'Not only have I discussed religion but found we talked a common

language, and I have prayed with them'.

I paused here to ask: Did these Friends attend mass out of curiosity? What meaning was there in the discussions on religion or in the reading of Catholic writings? To what extent are Friends alive in mind and spirit to the impact of Catholicism, ready to understand and appreciate and to evaluate? We find the answers in the second part of the questionnaire, where the questions deal with acceptance and non-acceptance; possible meeting points between Friends and Catholics, and what Friends think our Religious Society might learn from Catholicism.

Most Friends find it hard to accept the power of the Pope and of the hierarchy and the claim of the Catholic Church to absolute authority. The inexorable dogma (including for example the teaching about the significance of the Virgin Mary) and the importance of ritual are hard to understand. For almost all Friends the mother of our Lord is a vague, shadowy historic figure whom they respect. To many Friends the necessity of outward sacraments and much of the teaching of the Church on social life seems wrong. The mass and the confessional are points of 'non-acceptance' and Friends are troubled because they think the Church teaches that there is no direct approach to God. Others wrote of oppression, of great contrasts between the rich and poor, and 'I can't accept the discrepancy between the pomp of the Church and the simplicity of Jesus of Nazareth'. Where some Friends find sincerity of worship, a few find only superstition, and many deplore the fact that Catholics are not allowed to pray with other Christians. Intolerance and exclusiveness have been experienced and there is uneasiness behind the comments that 'the Catholic Church has power to control men's minds' and 'it seems that the truths of Christianity are moulded to fit the Roman system'.

From the firm stand of 'No Surrender' and the chill of censure, we move into the warmth of acceptance and appreciation. Many Friends comment on the loyalty and devotion of Catholics to their Church, and are quick to understand their strong belief and their worship and love of God; 'The way they talk of God is so natural'; 'The always open door of the Catholic Church receives all those who enter, into an atmosphere of prayer', and 'Mother Church sustains and holds'. The concern for family life and for the individual is close to the heart of Friends; 'When I got to know a Catholic family well I was surprised at the close relationship with the priest and at his concern for the physical and spiritual welfare of each member'. 'The self-sacrificing service of many priests and nuns has been an inspiration' and 'in the work of

Catholics like Danilo Dolci, Dorothy Day and the Worker-priests we find much unity'; 'the Church speaks to the needs of the poor and suffering'. 'It accepts human nature as it is'; and 'the availability of experienced priests is helpful to those in need'. 'The Church has compassion for sinners'. Compassion and acceptance!—these notes are struck again and again as Friends look at the Catholic Church. Then the note creeps in,—'Much depends on the local priests and on the bishop'.—What emptiness, what cruel emptiness there can be at times! A stone instead of bread! There is a hunger for beauty, beauty as seen in the ritual of the Catholic Church and in some of her buildings, but 'many of us feel that outward symbols may lead away from rather than towards the very object of our worship'. 'Beauty is at times spoiled by the tawdry'. And yet 'great music and art, beauty and dignity are closely united with the source of all love in the Real Presence'.

A number of Friends find unity with Catholics during mass 'at the mystical raising of the Host followed by silence and the belief in Christ's actual presence', and it is at this centre of mystery and of worship that some Friends feel at one with Catholics and are warmed by gratitude to the ancient Catholic Church. God is there, and 'neither Catholics nor Quakers compromise with the authority of God as they know it'.¹

In mysticism, contemplation and direct experience of God there is a point of contact. Christianity is our common source and we all use the Lord's Prayer, the 'Our Father'. Quakers and Catholics 'believe in the possibility of experiencing the divine' and in continued revelation. The 'desire to carry religion into daily life' and the belief that all life is sacramental is common to those who are loyal and dedicated. Catholics and Quakers value and work to have their own schools, for each believes strongly in permeation of religion in day to day education. 'Both are prepared to disobey the State for conscience sake' and 'both have a history of suffering'. In the service of Catholics towards their fellow men, and in their attitude towards people of other races, Friends find bonds of understanding.

Quite different views are expressed by a small number of Friends who 'doubt whether there can be any meeting point as far as religion is concerned'. 'Meeting points are almost impossible because Catholics are not allowed to mix with others in social or international work, nor are they allowed to worship with others'. 'The whole approach to religion is radically different'.

¹Taken from the letter of a Catholic who had been brought up in the Society of Friends.

While these statements may be true there are many Friends who believe we have something to learn from the Catholic Church. In many Catholics they see a total commitment and devotion to God and the Church. 'There is a sense of faith pervading all life', an unshakable belief in the goodness of God, and understanding of the grace of God and the divinity of Christ. 'There seems to be more awareness of individual and corporal sinfulness in that all fall short of the glory of God'.

In their answers Friends suggest that many of us need to learn the regular daily practice of prayer and meditation; that we might discover the value of Retreats, perhaps of fasting and self-denial, and a disregard of bodily comfort. 'We might learn to live as joyfully as many Catholics do'. 'From their understanding of the deepest human needs and the use they make of 'depth' psychology we have much to learn'. Although a few Friends commented critically on confessions made to a priest, others recognise the healing value of confession. In our anxiety not to force conformity to a creed we often neglect to pass on the basic principles of our faith to those who are seeking. Admiration was expressed for the way in which the Catholic Church teaches her people. 'We should give better instruction to attenders and to those who apply for membership' and 'We might understand more fully the power of symbolism and ritual in the lives of children and the importance to them of a religion of authority'.

A Friend writes of a Catholic priest who accepted with humility the neglect and oppression of his superiors. When saying mass for a congregation who were living in real poverty—'I was deeply moved, especially at the point when I *heard* him break the wafer. The humble ministrant at that moment seemed greater than his Church'.

Standing out like a beacon above everything that Friends have written of acceptance and learning-points is the personal contact with individual Catholics and the qualities which have been seen during a brief meeting or discovered during years of friendship. Friends write of sincerity, discipline, obedience, kindness, generosity and of humility,—yes humility!—for many this seems to have plucked a chord—'they have humility and reticence'. 'What infinite pride in their Church, and what personal humility!' Humour and thankfulness, compassion and peace of mind, and faith so strong that it brings certainty and fearless courage.

As I read and re-read the mass of material which I received, certain features begin to stand out. I find that my own interest in this subject is

shared by many Friends; not only cool academic interest but an interest which goes deeper. Almost every aspect of Catholicism has received attention. It is clear that some Friends have judged their experiences too easily, with little thought or willingness to understand. A note of hardship and superiority and of sheer ignorance is struck occasionally. I am much more impressed by the weight of knowledge and acceptance I have found; by an attitude of humility and maturity of judgement. Most of the replies indicate a sureness of response as though Friends wrote out of experience. I am left with the sense that many are looking at the Catholic Church with a steady gaze from a well-centred rootedness in Quakerism. As Friends have thought about the Catholic Church and commented on her points of failure and of achievement, the whole range of weakness and of strength of the Society of Friends has been revealed.

While attending two conferences in the United States in the Summer of 1961 I met a dozen or so people who had in their early days been brought up in the Catholic Church and as adults had become members of the Society of Friends. Some of their comments are of special interest.

A few felt 'the weight of individual responsibility to be most awesome and even a little frightening'. In expressing appreciation of the Quaker Meeting for Worship they spoke of its 'vitally creative silence', its 'opening to a direct relationship with God' and 'the centring of one's devotion on obedience to the person of Christ rather than ideas about him'. Commenting on the Society of Friends they spoke of the devotion of its members to the basic beliefs of the Society, their tolerance, sincerity, humility and loving kindness. These words seem to echo what had been said of Catholics whom Friends had met and known.

In the face of such personal encounters distrust and fear lose their grip and we begin to feel the presence of God among his people; humble, devoted, disciplined men and women belonging to the Catholic Church and to the Society of Friends.