

we, Reverend Fathers, with the affairs of the multitude, so busied in holding the many to the common road of the commandments, that we lose sight of the few, from whom God demands higher things, and find no time to watch the throbbings of special piety in their hearts and to aid them in their ascensions towards special union with God. And yet if all this is not done, the plannings of divine grace are thwarted; souls are held to lower planes, which should have risen to the more exalted; the Church suffers in its general welfare; and our own parishes never see, never taste the full sweetness of the idealism of the supernatural. All things said, the

Work of Fostering Vocations

to the Sisterhoods falls, primarily and pre-eminently, to the pastor. It is his word that brings to the maiden the consciousness of her vocation: it is his hand that props it up in its subsequent efflorescences: it is his advice, given in season, that wards off opposition of father and mother. And what is far more important than all else, it is the ministry of the priest that creates in the parish the rich supernatural atmosphere, where vocations, so to speak, are at home, and by native instinct bloom and reach maturity. It is not to be presumed that where the ministry is duly fruitful such atmosphere has not been created, and that there now and then souls do not arise to exceptional heights in aspirations, of holiness, even unto those of the most exalted counsels of the Gospel. The garden, producing only the common plant and the low-sized shrub, has not been duly tilled and fertilised. With the proper skill and diligence, here and there, at least, through its parterres, the more beautiful flower would shed its fragrance, the more stately sapling would embellish the prospect. To priests, official caretakers of the garden of the Lord, the divinely appointed distributors of the enriching dews of Heaven, I address my special appeal on behalf of vocations to our Catholic Sisterhoods.

To you, daughters of the Church, kneeling in solemn consecration of yourselves to God, I speak my congratulations. You have heard the voice of the Incarnate Word—'Come, and follow Me.' No other invitation could there be so enchanting in love, so rich in promise of reward. You have answered—'Behold, Lord, we have left all things, to follow Thee.' No words more noble could you pronounce, none other so certain of winning felicity in time and in eternity.

LETTERS TO A PROTESTANT ENQUIRER

(By MONSIGNOR BENSON, in the *Universe*.)

I.—GENERAL.

My Dear Sir,—

You told me the other day, when we had a conversation together, that the chief obstacle to your becoming a Catholic was that sense you had of the tremendous gulf that would separate you in future (should you make your submission to the Church) from all your past experiences; that the gulf was so great that you did not feel justified in attempting to leap it; and that until further light or conviction came to you, you preferred, therefore, to remain where you were.

Now, at the time that you said this, I did not (I am afraid) seem to pay much serious attention to it. I said, if you remember, that that would be all right when once that you had leapt the gulf, and that a certain sort of 'blindness' was a necessary element in any act of sheer faith. And then we went on to talk of other matters, and to discuss particular points of Catholic belief about which you had difficulties. The result of the interview was (to my mind) rather unsatisfactory, and, I think, to yours, too.

Will you allow me now to return to that general statement about the 'gulf' that you made, and to explain, as well as I can, certain questions that you raised from that point of view? Because I believe that, after thinking it over, I understand better now what

your principal difficulty is; and I think that, if we can get that right, the rest will follow easily enough.

May I begin by expressing in my own words what I think it is that you feel?

You feel that, for good or evil, the religion in which you have been educated has profoundly influenced your mind, that it has, indeed, become a part of your very self; and that, further, as a matter of fact, that religion is right and true and good. At any rate, it seems the best of which you are capable.

You have learned, for instance, in the denomination of which you are still a nominal member certain tremendous truths about God, and have received in your worship communications from that God—lights and graces—which you can never possibly deny. You are absolutely certain, for example, that God is your Father, that Jesus Christ is your Redeemer, that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and contains His Revelation, that the Holy Spirit guides both you and all other sincere souls who seek and submit themselves to that guidance. There are other matters rather more doubtful in your mind; for instance, you have never learned very distinctly—or, at any rate, now you do not know very clearly—what you ought to believe about Baptism and the Lord's Supper; you are certain that they were instituted by Christ, and must be used, therefore, by all Christian people; and, more, that they are in some sense real means of grace; but beyond that you are rather suspicious of any precise dogmatising on these points. These, however, are not vital and certain to you, as are the other great fundamental doctrines I have mentioned. These other doctrines—the Fatherhood of God, the Redemption of the Word by Jesus Christ, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, especially to those who accept the Bible as God's Word—these seem to you really to matter, and to be (as I should partly agree, too) the most fundamental truths of Christianity. You have grown up in them, you have made progress in the spiritual life along their lines, you are absolutely certain that they are the chief truths which Christ came to reveal.

Now, on the other side, you happen to have been brought into contact with Catholicism, and a number of things have conspired to attract you towards that religion. For instance, you mentioned the following arguments that have appealed to you:—You have been struck by the undoubted historical continuity of the Roman Catholic Church, by its extraordinary vitality, by the unity of faith among its members, by their churchgoing habits, by their obedience to what they believe to be Divine authority, by their zeal for conversion, by the ardor and reverence of their worship. These first drew you towards the Church, in spite of certain other points which repelled you. Then you began to read a little, and were impressed by the very logical arguments of our controversialists; and you began to see that we Catholics really had a good deal to say for ourselves. Then you inquired yet further of various Catholic friends, and you were astonished by the reasonableness, and the identity, too, of their answers. You learnt, for instance, that we did not adore the Blessed Virgin Mary as God, but gave her reverence for the sake of Him Who was her Son, and so on. So, little by little, you began to come nearer to us, until, it might be said, you had a tolerably true and comprehensive view of what it was that we Catholics really believe; and you got rid, at the same time, of a good many untrue ideas about that same Faith of ours. Then, a little before you came to see me for the first time, it actually dawned upon you, at any rate as a possibility, that we Catholics really might be right after all; that the Catholic religion might be true in a way that the Protestant religion was not, and that, if so, it might be some day your appalling duty to become a Papist, to turn your back upon your past and begin all over again. You saw, in a word, the apparent reasonableness of the Catholic claim; you could not detect any evident flaws in the process of argument by which we defend that claim; and, almost at the same moment, that difficulty I mentioned at the beginning of my letter occurred to you with crushing force. 'Even though,' you said to yourself, 'the Catholic religion is true in a certain kind of

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